

**EXPLORING STORIES OF REGISTERED COUNSELLORS ABOUT THEIR
RELEVANCE AND FUTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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DECLARATION

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I declare that ***Exploring stories of Registered Counsellors about their relevance and future in South Africa*** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

(L.S Mashiane)

DATE

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ABSTRACT

The category of Registered Counsellors was created to provide psychological service at primary level to previously disadvantaged communities, yet there is lack of public and professional knowledge concerning this category. This study aimed at finding reasons why people choose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance and future is in South Africa.

Social constructionism is the epistemological framework for this qualitative investigation. Three registered counsellors aged between 27 and 31 were chosen for this study using a combination of purposive and snowball sample technique. Rich data were collected through open ended interviews. This approach was chosen as the most relevant because it helped in giving a voice to the three 'registered counsellors' which in turn helped in getting a holistic understanding of the participants' point of view.

Thematic analysis technique was used to identify key themes. The main themes identified in comparative analysis were the following: the need to help, feeling of fulfillment, working in a multidisciplinary team, registered counsellors as first point of entry, experiencing barriers in terms of lack of recognition, confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals; and the role of HPCSA.

The results showed that the participants became registered counsellors because of the need to help others. The results also showed that registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa because their services are needed for the well-being of society. There is a future for registered counsellors in South Africa to close the gap in terms of mental health workforce shortage.

Keywords: Registered counsellor, South Africa, scope of practice, counselling, social constructionism, Health Professional Council of South Africa, mental health.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Personal Statement	2
1.3 The aim of the study	3
1.4 Epistemology	5
1.5 The design of the study	6
1.6 Research participants	7
1.7 Sampling	8
1.8 Data collection method	9
1.9 Data Analysis	10
1.10 Validity and Reliability	11
1.11 Ethical Considerations	12
1.12 The format of the study	13
1.13 Chapter outline	13
1.14 Conclusion	15

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 History of counselling	16
<i>2.2.1 The vocational guidance movement</i>	17
<i>2.2.2 Mental Health Counselling movement</i>	17
<i>2.2.3 The development of professional identity</i>	18
<i>2.2.4 The influence of Federal Legislation</i>	19
<i>2.2.5 Credentialing and professionalisation of Counselling</i>	19
2.3 Counselling as a helping relationship	20
<i>2.3.1 What is a helping relationship?</i>	21
<i>2.3.2 Components of a helping relationship</i>	22
<i>2.3.3 Personal characteristics of counsellors</i>	24
<i>2.3.4 Basic counselling skills</i>	26
2.4 South African mental health in relation	
to the category of registered counsellors	27
<i>2.4.1 Medical model</i>	31
<i>2.4.2 The Health Belief model</i>	33
<i>2.4.3 Sociological perspectives</i>	35
<i>2.4.3.1 The Interactionist perspective</i>	36
<i>2.4.3.2 The Functionalist perspective</i>	37
<i>2.4.3.3 The Conflict perspective</i>	38

2.5 Registered Counsellors	39
2.6 Recent studies on Registered Counsellors	41
2.7 Conclusion	48
 CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	 51
3.1 Introduction	51
3.2 Paradigms	51
<i>3.2.1 Positivist paradigm</i>	52
<i>3.2.2 Interpretive paradigm</i>	53
<i>3.2.3 Constructionist paradigm</i>	53
3.3 What is Epistemology?	54
3.4 The Newtonian or Modernistic Epistemology	54
<i>3.4.1 Reductionism</i>	55
<i>3.4.2 Linear Causality</i>	55
<i>3.4.3 Neutral Objectivity</i>	55
3.5 A move away from Modernism	56
<i>3.5.1 Simple cybernetics</i>	56
<i>3.5.2 Cybernetics of cybernetics</i>	59
3.6 A postmodern Epistemology	60
3.7 Constructivism	61
3.8 Social Constructionism	61
<i>3.8.1 The role of language</i>	64
<i>3.8.2 Co-construction of meaning</i>	65

3.8.3 <i>The role of societal context</i>	66
3.9 Conclusion	69
 CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	 70
4.1 Introduction	70
4.2 What is Research Methodology?	70
4.3 The Research Design	72
4.4 Population	80
4.5 Sampling	80
4.6 Data Collection	81
4.7 Validity and Reliability	84
4.8 Data Analysis	88
4.9 Ethical Considerations	92
4.9.1 <i>Informed Consent</i>	92
4.9.2 <i>Deception</i>	93
4.9.3 <i>Privacy and Confidentiality</i>	93
4.9.4 <i>Research participants' rights</i>	94
4.10 Conclusion	95
 CHAPTER 5: KAIT'S STORY	 96
5.1 Introduction	96
5.2 The research setting	97
5.3 The story of Kait	98

5.4 Emerging themes	100
5.4.1 <i>The need to help others</i>	100
5.4.2 <i>Feeling of fulfillment</i>	104
5.4.3 <i>Working in a multidisciplinary team</i>	105
5.4.4 <i>Registered Counsellors as first point of entry</i>	107
5.4.5 <i>Experiencing barriers</i>	109
5.4.5.1 <i>Lack of recognition</i>	110
5.4.5.2 <i>Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals</i>	111
5.4.5.3 <i>The role of HPCSA</i>	113
5.5 Personal reflections	114
5.6 Conclusion	115
 CHAPTER 6: MARY'S STORY	 120
6.1 Introduction	120
6.2 The research setting	121
6.3 Mary's story	122
6.4 Emerging themes	123
6.4.1 <i>The need to help others</i>	123
6.4.2 <i>Feeling of fulfillment</i>	127
6.4.3 <i>Working in a multidisciplinary team</i>	129
6.4.4 <i>Registered Counsellors as first point of entry</i>	131
6.4.5 <i>Affordable fees</i>	133
6.4.6 <i>Experiencing barriers</i>	135

6.4.6.1 <i>Lack of recognition</i>	135
6.4.6.2 <i>Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals</i>	136
6.4.6.3 <i>The role of HPCSA</i>	136
6.5 Personal reflections	139
6.6 Conclusion	140
 CHAPTER 7: SASHA'S STORY	 146
7.1 Introduction	146
7.2 Research setting	147
7.3 The story of Sasha	148
7.4 Emerging themes	149
7.4.1 <i>The need to help others</i>	149
7.4.2 <i>Feeling of fulfillment</i>	151
7.4.3 <i>Working in a multidisciplinary team</i>	152
7.4.4 <i>Registered Counsellors as first point of entry</i>	154
7.4.5 <i>Affordable fees</i>	154
7.4.6 <i>Experiencing barriers</i>	155
7.4.6.1 <i>Lack of recognition</i>	156
7.4.6.2 <i>Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals</i>	157
7.4.6.3 <i>The role of HPCSA</i>	158
7.5 Personal reflections	159
7.6 Conclusion	160

CHAPTER 8: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS	165
8.1 Introduction	165
8.2 The need to help others	165
8.3 Feeling of fulfillment	169
8.4 Working in a multidisciplinary team	171
8.5 Registered Counsellors as the first point of entry	174
8.6 Experiencing barriers	178
8.7 Conclusion	187
 CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION	 189
9.1 Introduction	189
9.2 Evaluating the study	189
9.3 Strength of the study	195
9.4 Limitations to the study	197
9.5 Recommendation for future research	198
9.6 Personal reflections	198
9.7 Conclusion	199
 REFERENCES	 201

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Counselling is regarded as a process whereby advice and help are given to someone to resolve personal, social or psychological problems.

McLeod (2011) as cited in Govender (2014), regards counselling as a private activity which is largely conducted in conditions that require confidentiality. A counselling session will be effective if the counselor meets the required characteristics of how a counselor must be. There are professional characteristics, namely, the education and training of counselors and personal characteristics which encompass the type of personality one must have to become an effective counselor.

Registered counsellors were born from the idea of offering basic primary psychological counselling to previously disadvantaged groups. According to the HPCSA, the role of registered counsellors is to make psychological services accessible to the diverse South African population and to provide psychological and preventative interventions that focus on supporting and promoting the enhancement of wellbeing in community contexts. (HPCSA, form 258). The primary function of registered counsellors is to promote, prevent, intervene and refer. The HPCSA also states that registered counsellors differ from psychologists as psychologists work on a more complex and specialised level.

For example, registered counsellors can only perform psychological assessments excluding “neuropsychological and diagnostic tests” which can only be performed by psychologists (Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974).

South Africa is facing challenges in terms of mental health problems. According to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), mental health is not given the priority it deserves. SADAG's paper on 'The sick state of Mental Health' asserts that one third of the population suffers from mental health issues and 75% will not receive treatment. This is true as concluded in several studies that maintain that many people in South Africa do not have access to mental health facilities.

One such study cited that "a large of the population has little or no access to psychological services and until recently the delivery of such services has fallen on the shoulders of registered clinical, counselling and educational psychologists" (Elkonin & Sandiso, 2006, p.599). SADAG is of the same view because according to them, 85% of psychologists are in private practice servicing 14% of the population. This is a problem since many people cannot access the services of the above mentioned professional. This was a gap that was identified by HPCSA and as a result the category of registered counsellors was created.

1.2 Personal statement

From my experience as a registered counsellor, I realised that many people do not have any idea about the category of registered counsellors. What people know is that counselling is conducted by a psychologist or alternatively one would go to a social worker when they have social issues.

This did not sit well with me because the category of registered counsellors is so important yet there is little knowledge or people are ignorant in terms of the issues of mental health.

This prompted me to conduct this study where I wanted to explore a research topic that will give answers to why people choose to become registered counsellors even though this profession is not well known to majority of people in South Africa, also to shed light to the relevance and future of this profession in the South African context.

McLeod (2011) as cited in Govender (2014) states that research studies allow counsellors to learn about and from the work of others in the field and give the profession a means of pooling knowledge and experience on an international scale. I hope that from the findings of this study, more information will emerge in the form of themes about reasons why people chose to become registered counsellors and how relevant their services are in the South African context. This will in future ignite more research studies to be conducted so that people will be aware of the category and make use of the services offered by registered counsellors.

1.3 The aim of the study

The aim of the study is two-fold. Firstly, it is to understand reasons why people choose to become registered counsellors. Secondly, it is to understand what their relevance and future are in the South African context.

Through in-depth questions in the form of interviews, the three participants were given a space to tell their stories and thus provided answers to the reason why the study was conducted. They were afforded a safe space in order to be open and provide information by telling their stories, thus, were regarded as experts. The participants were afforded a space where their voices were heard.

Through these in-depths interviews, the researcher hoped that rich and new information would emerge on reasons why people opt to become registered counsellors and this has helped the researcher to get an idea of how the world in which the participants live is constructed. In a nutshell, the study takes note of the stories told by the three respondents as a way of constructing reality.

The researcher plans to give voice to participants without any prejudice or being judgmental. Despite this, the researcher became part of the process as social constructionists reject the issue of objectivity and strongly regard it as an impossibility (Burr, 2015; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). According to social constructionists the researcher is subjectively involved in the work being investigated than being objective and detached from the process of inquiry. The researcher is aware that her involvement in the conversations and her own experience as a registered counsellor are likely to colour the interview process and the final outcome of the study. Thus, the researcher views the study as being co-constructed between herself and the respondents. This means that meaning-making is a partnership between the researcher and the participants.

Social constructionists are of the opinion that a researcher must view the research process as co-production between themselves and the people they are researching (Burr, 2015). This means that social constructionists place an emphasis on how meaning is created in conversation with others. This co-constructed reality exists in the domain of shared meanings.

The researcher in this study acknowledges that when she and the respondents learn the meanings they assign to counselling, reality will be co-constructed through knowledge gained.

1.4 Epistemology

According to Hesse-Biber (2017, p. 6), epistemology is a “philosophical belief system about who can be a knowledge builder”. It includes how the relationship between the researcher and research participants is understood. Many researchers use different theories of knowledge to try and answer the research questions. These include positivism, interpretivism and realism.

Positivism is an epistemological position which is of the view that knowledge of a social phenomenon is based on what can be observed and recorded rather than subjective understandings (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Interpretivism stresses the importance of people’s subjective interpretations and understanding of social phenomena. The main focus of this theory of knowledge is on how people interpret the social world to allow different perspectives to be explored. Realism asserts that knowledge of a social phenomenon is based on both what can be observed and hidden structures whose effect can be observed. In other words, realists are of the view that an external world exists independently of our representations of it. Social constructionism is the theory of knowledge that was used in this study in order to understand why people followed the path of becoming registered counsellors.

This theory of knowledge is relevant to this study because social constructionists believe that through daily interactions between people, we construct knowledge and understanding of the world. This social interaction and more importantly language are of great interest to social constructionists (Burr, 1995).

This is important to this study because through interviews the participants voiced their stories and the issue of language was taken into consideration. This was done by listening to life stories and experiences of participants and as such language, cultural and social contexts of the participants are important in constructing reality. As mentioned earlier that the study is being co-constructed between the researcher and the participants, this goes hand in hand with the social constructionist's view that the "researcher views the research process as a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching" (Burr, 2015, p.172).

1.5 The design of the study

A qualitative research design was used in this study in order to explore behavior and experiences. This is important because this study aimed to generate information from the participants themselves as stated by Dawson (2002, p.14) that qualitative methods "attempt to get an in-depth opinion from the participant".

According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999, as cited in Stanton, 2005), the qualitative approach allows one to inquire into personal stories and meanings of persons and it is not interested with generalising findings to a larger population.

Qualitative research design differs inherently from the quantitative research design in that it does not provide the investigator with a step by step plan or a fixed recipe to follow (De Vos et al. 2002, as cited in Govender, 2014). This also applies to this study as the researcher is flexible in terms of accommodating any new information that can emerge.

This study included the following characteristics of a research design as formulated by (Creswell, 2007):

- Natural setting
- Researcher as the key instrument
- Multiple sources of data
- Emergent design
- Theoretical lens
- Interpretive Inquiry
- Holistic account
- Participants meaning.

1.6 Research participants

The population comprised of three people who are registered counsellors with the HPCSA. The information about these counsellors was obtained from the iRegister on the HPCSA website.

Since the iRegister does not contain information such as telephone numbers, addresses and websites, a telephone directory was used to get such information.

The following criteria applied in terms of participants in the study:

- Participants had to be registered as counsellors with the HPCSA and have an active status on the iRegister;
- Participants had to be fluent in English as this was the language used during the research;
- Gender was not a determining factor;
- Participants' current work (whether in the field or not) was not a determining factor;
- Participants had to have at least experience or to have had worked as a counsellor.

1.7 Sampling

Sampling involves “decisions about which people, settings, events, behaviours and / or social processes to observe” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 44). The main aim of sampling is to select a sample that will be a representation of the population in terms of the conclusions to be drawn. Since this study is not concerned with statistical analysis, a small sample was used rather than a large sample. This study is concerned with in-depth understanding, therefore, a few information rich cases were selected and in this case it was three people who are regarded as registered counsellors.

Purposeful sampling was used because it deals more with description rather than generalisation (Dawson, 2002). Purposeful sampling is often chosen based on the research questions and sometimes on the resources available to the researcher. Purposeful sampling is described as seeking “information-rich” sources (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, p. 253). This is relevant to this study since the researcher aimed to get rich information from participants.

Since the researcher herself is a registered counsellor and knows other registered counsellors in Pretoria, a convenience sampling was used.

1.8 Data collection method

The study employed interviews as the data collection method. An interview is usually a direct communication between two or more people with the aim of eliciting information, feelings and opinions from the interviewee (Matthew & Ross, 2010).

Unstructured interviews were used as they are believed to help in getting a holistic understanding of the participants' point of view. They help the participants to be free to talk about what they feel is important.

At some point, the researcher asked questions and guided the interview as per her own experience as a registered counsellor. Unstructured interviews are relevant because the interviewee is in control as he or she is regarded as an expert. The interviewee was also encouraged to expand and elaborate on what he or she was saying. As earlier stated that qualitative research does not involve rigid step by step guide, this also applies in this study because most questions were created during the interview as flexibility is practiced by qualitative researchers.

A voice recorder was also used to help the researcher in identifying the themes that emerged during the interview. The researcher also took notes during the interview to help in terms of grouping the emerging themes. All these were utilised as permission was granted by the participants.

1.9 Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to “describe, evaluate and explain the content and characteristics of the data that have been collected in the research project” (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 317).

This study used thematic analysis which helped the researcher to work with raw data in identifying and interpreting key ideas and themes since the main goal of thematic analysis is “to make inferences from verbal material, analysed in the form of text in written transcripts” (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012, p.129). This is appropriate since the study is using qualitative methods and qualitative data is mainly about “interpreting and getting a good understanding of the words, stories, accounts and explanations of our research respondents” (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 373).

The social constructionism theory of knowledge which this study uses also stresses the importance of language in constructing reality, therefore, thematic analysis fits perfectly as a method of analysing data.

Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) propose five steps in data analysis, namely:

- *Familiarisation and immersion*
- *Inducing themes*
- *Coding.*
- *Elaboration*
- *Interpretation and checking.*

The above steps were used to analyse data for this study.

1.10 Validity and Reliability

Reliability according to Stanton (2005) refers to the degree in which the researcher's observation of the gathered information can be trusted.

Reliability is more concerned with the consistency in measures. The following guidelines for ensuring reliability advocated by Stiles (as cited in Stanton, 2005) were deployed during the study:

- *Disclosure of orientation;*
- *The social and cultural setting;*
- *Internal processes of investigation;*
- *Engaging with information.*

Validity refers to the degree to which the study actually measures what it is supposed to measure. This means that the study must be credible in terms of producing findings that are convincing (Stanton, 2005). To ensure that the analysis is credible and transparent to others, Matthews & Ross (2010) propose that the analysis should meet the following criteria:

- *Systematic and comprehensive* where a set of procedures should be followed and the same procedure applied to all the cases;
- *Grounded* in terms of the data taken in a raw state because it was said or written;
- *Dynamic* in the sense that ideas and themes emerge during the process and as such the process must be flexible and allow for changes;
- *Accessible* in terms of how the researchers' interpretations are used to develop analysis. These must be open and understandable.

Quantitative researchers usually identify validity threats in advance and try to control them, regarding them as 'nuisance' that needs to be eliminated (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

On the other hand, qualitative researchers believe that "these 'nuisance' variables are an integral part of real-world settings and instead of eliminating them, try to find out what impact they have on the outcome of the study" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 63).

1.11 Ethical Considerations

According to Barlow & Durand (1995, p. 693-694) people who participate in research have the following rights:

- To be informed about the purpose of the study;
- The right to privacy;
- The right to be treated with respect and dignity;
- The right to be protected from physical and mental harm;
- The right to choose to participate or refuse to participate without prejudice and reprisals;
- The right to anonymity in the reporting of the results;
- The right to the safeguarding of their records.

All of the above rights were considered during this study.

1.12 The format of the study

This study followed a format that is two-fold; firstly, the theoretical part where literature relevant to the study was reviewed; secondly, epistemological stance of the study was discussed, as well as the research methods that were employed.

The practical part of the study is in a form of interviews with three participants who presently fall in the category of registered counsellors with the Health Professional Council of South Africa. The language used in the practical part was casual so as to make participants feel free and at ease to voice their stories. The questions are in-depth in order to try and illicit much information to help in answering the research questions.

Language is important because it is more than just a way of connecting people, but when people talk to each other the world gets constructed. Corey, 2001 (as cited in Stanton, 2005) states that the social constructionism is of the view that reality is based on the use of language and reality. Corey further explain that language is a function of the situations in which people live.

1.13 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 is the introductory chapter.

Chapter 2 focuses on relevant literature in terms of the research topic. Literature on counselling is highlighted since a counselor's main aim is to offer counselling to a client. Literature on Mental Health is reviewed since one cannot divorce Mental Health from the reason the category of registered Counsellor was created.

Information on HPCSA in terms of the category of registered counsellors is highlighted. Lastly existing literature on studies done about the category of registered counsellors is reviewed.

Chapter 3 outlines the theory of knowledge that was used in the study. Different paradigms, namely, positivism, interpretative and constructionist are discussed.

Different definitions of epistemology are highlighted. Modernism as an epistemological stance is discussed followed by a brief discussion on how the move from modernism gave way to postmodernism. Basic concepts of postmodernism are briefly discussed followed by a discussion on constructivism. Finally Social Constructionist epistemological stance and its guiding principles are discussed to show how they fit in the context of the study. The researcher showed how this epistemology practically try to answer the research question.

Chapter 4 describes the research methods undertaken for this study. The qualitative research approach is discussed together with the research design including the characteristics, data collection method, issues of validity and reliability, and data analysis in the form of thematic analytic technique applied to bring out the emerging themes from the data. Issues of ethical considerations in terms of Informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, the right to be treated with respect and dignity are also discussed.

Chapter 5 The story of participant 1

Chapter 6 The story of participant 2

Chapter 7 The story of participant 3

Chapter 8 Analysis of the themes, comparative analysis of the recurring themes with available literature and the researcher's personal views

Chapter 9 Conclusion and recommendations.

1.14 Conclusion

This research seeks to understand the reasons why people chose to become registered counsellors and what they think their relevance and future are in the South Africa context. The researcher hopes that the findings from this study will shed light and show the importance of the category of registered counsellor. This will in turn help to minimise the impact that mental health issues have in South Africa.

By exploring the stories of registered counsellors, the researcher hopes to understand how these registered counsellors view their role in South Africa and if there is a future for this profession. From this study or findings, people will hopefully gain knowledge about the category and might want to learn more about it. Once the category is known, people might use the services provided by these professionals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The researcher is interested in exploring the stories of registered counsellors about their relevance and future in South Africa. It is therefore important to highlight the history of counselling for one to get an idea in terms of where counselling originates from. Literature on counselling is highlighted in terms of definitions, counselling skills, characteristics of counsellors and reasons why people chose to become counsellors. Mental health issues in South Africa in relation to the category of registered counsellors are discussed together with reasons why the HPCSA created the category of registered counsellors. Different models and perspectives on mental illness are discussed so that one gets an idea of how mental health and illness are perceived. Lastly literature will be reviewed on recent research or studies that have already been conducted in terms of the category of registered counsellors.

2.2 History of counselling

Before 1900 most counselling was in the form of giving advice and information. During those years most pioneers in counselling identified themselves as teachers and social reform (Gladding, 1996). These pioneers mainly focused on teaching children and young adults about life and the world of work.

Between 1900 and 1950, the evolution of counselling was shaped by major events like World War I and II, The Industrial Revolution, Freud's analytic theory and The Great Depression among others (Gladding, 1996, Capuzzi & Gross, 2009).

From 1960 onwards, counselling developed as a profession. There was much development in terms of standardisation of training and certification of counsellors (Gladding, 1996).

During the 20th century, the development of counselling as a profession was made possible by different movements. These movements included the following:

2.2.1 The vocational guidance movement

The pioneers of this movement include Lysander Richards and Frank Parsons (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009). Richards advocated that counsellors should study occupations and the people they counselled.

On the other hand, Parsons was more concerned with social reforms, more especially in assisting people to make sound occupational choices. For this, he was referred to as the “father of guidance” (Capuzzi and Gross, 2009, p. 6). He was the first to record the term *vocational guidance* in his report. Educational settings were regarded as the first homes of counselling in terms of vocational guidance. The pioneers in counselling reflected the society’s need for workers who were skilled and happy in what they did. As a result, counselling in regard to career choice remained an integral part of this movement.

2.2.2 Mental Health Counselling movement

This movement came about because of the inhumane way people with emotional disorders were treated. The pioneers of this movement advocated for the establishment of institutions to treat people with mental disorders.

Children with emotional problems were able to be counselled at schools and the first community psychiatric clinic was established (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009).

The World War 1 influenced the development of testing. For example, the development of psychological instruments such as Army Alpha and Beta IQ which tests intelligent took place in order to screen personnel in the army (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009). After the World War 1, psychological testing spread widely in education, industrial personnel classifications and counselling offices. This led to knowledge about the use of standardised tests becoming part of the education for counsellors. Counsellors were expected to be experts in selecting and using appropriate instruments from a number of those offered.

2.2.3 The development of professional identity

The Second World War continued the influence of vocational guidance and mental health movements along with rehabilitation counselling. During this time the use of standardised tests was in full swing, but there was a need for personnel to help soldiers deal with “battle neuroses” (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009, p. 12). This was accomplished through training of medical school graduates and clinical psychologists. Counselling centres within hospitals were established. This led to the term *counselling psychology*. Professional Psychology was born and the American Psychology Association (APA) was asked to set standards of training for the new programs in universities.

One of the pioneers of counselling during this movement was Carl Rogers and his person-centred therapy.

He emphasised the clients' creative responsibility in enhancing themselves toward self-actualisation (Brammer, Shostrom & Abrego, 1989). Rogers's idea was that "individuals had the capacity to explore themselves and to make decisions without an authoritative judgement from a counselor" (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009, p. 13). According to Rogers, the client rather than the counselor was the most important factor. This according to me is on par with the social constructionist perspective that views the client as the expert and cautions against the counsellor enforcing his or her account of reality on the client. This is important because this research employs the Social Constructionism perspective. Carl Rogers brought a psychological orientated counseling theory into guidance movement which led counselling profession into the broad disciplines of education and psychology (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009).

2.2.4 The influence of Federal Legislation

The Federal government in the USA influenced the development of counselling profession by offering governmental actions and legislation. Examples of these legislations include The Mental Health Study Act, Rehabilitation Act etcetera. These legislations or laws helped to make sure that the counselling profession becomes regulated.

2.2.5 Credentialing and professionalisation of Counselling

Credentialing was used to represent a "broad array of activities pertaining to the establishment of professional training standards and regulations for practice" (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009, p. 29).

This term covers three major professional activities, namely, accreditation, certification and licensure. These activities still apply to the counselling profession in the present day.

Accreditation is a means of providing accountability. This is a process of regulation and quality control by developing standards for training programs. Accreditation for counsellors began approximately 40 years ago and was facilitated by the American Counselling Association. Certification regulations are practice acts because they control who may and may not practice as counsellors. Licensure is a credential that regulates either the title, practice or both of an occupation group.

This is usually a means by the state to protect the public from incompetent practitioners. The fact that a state considers a profession important enough to regulate may lead to that profession being recognised by the public (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009). Is this the case with registered counsellors who are at the center of this research?

The roots of counseling are deeply embedded in different disciplines that have come together and formed one discipline. This has led to the development of counselling specialists offering a broad range of services. Counsellors often deal with a number of social and mental problems that affect the population.

2.3 Counselling as a helping relationship

Counselling and helping are often used as synonyms as they are both used as ways of offering assistance to people in everyday life. This is because in life, there are many informal helping relationships where we seek help from friends, family and coworkers.

2.3.1 What is a helping relationship?

The counselor-client helping relationship is unique in that “it is a one-way relationship with the purpose of resolving a concern and/or fostering the personal growth of one person-the client” (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009, p. 58).

“Counselling is a guided process of exploration and discovery” (Wicks, 1979, p. 62). This means that counselling is a process whereby the counselor helps the client to do his or her problem solving with the resources they have.

This according to Wicks (1979) can be done by the counsellor through reflecting the client’s emotions, taking into account the client’s strengths and limitations, as well as helping the client clarify the issues and finally helping the client identify and evaluate alternatives. The aim of counselling is “to enable the client to discover and build on his or her own wisdom rather than have the wisdom imparted to them from the counselor” (Keithley, Bond & Marsh, 2002, p. 7). This means that counselling helps individuals to make changes that would help them live meaningful lives.

An effective counselling process is important in making sure that the above is achieved. According to Brammer, Shostrom & Abrego (1989) the counselling process is a means of helping and providing conditions for people to have a meaningful life. This can be achieved by providing resources for people to be able to help themselves. Etherington (2001) concurs that the role of a counselor is therefore to convey trust in people’s innate ability and promote an environment for them to realise their potential.

Seligman (2004) as cited in (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009) suggests that a positive helping relationship has the following characteristics:

- It provides a safe and protective environment for clients;
- It encourages collaboration where the counselor and client play an active role in the counselling process. This is in agreement with the social constructionist perspective that rejects the issue of objectivity and strongly regards it as an impossibility. According to social constructionists the counselor is subjectively involved in the counselling process than being objective and detached from the process;
- There is a mutual feeling of shared warmth, caring, affirmation and respect;
- Clients can identify with their counselor and use them as role models;
- Clients and counsellors have an agreement on goals and procedures; and sessions are structured with the end goal being accomplishment of goals;
- Clients and counselor view themselves as engaged in a shared endeavor that is likely to succeed.

This will help with co-construction of meaning as advocated by social constructionists. Social constructionists believe that through daily interactions between people, we construct knowledge and understanding of the world. This is of essence to this research.

2.3.2 Components of a helping relationship

Carl Rogers was instrumental in proposing the essential components of a helping relationship.

Rogers believed that the following needed to be present for the relationship to be therapeutic; congruence, empathy and positive with regard to the individual:

- Congruence refers to the “therapists’ capacity to sense and share their own felt experiences as they interact with the client” (Brammer, Shostrom & Abrego, 1989, p. 34). That is, the counselor should be genuine and real in the relationship;
- Unconditional positive regard refers to the counselor accepting the client without evaluation or judgement (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009). The counselor completely trusts the clients’ resources for self –understanding and positive change;
- Empathy refers to the understanding of the clients’ experiences and feelings. The counselor focuses his or her attention on the needs and experiences of the client; and Roger believes that this empathic understanding has a “curative effect on the client” (Brammer, Shostrom & Abrego, 1989, p. 34).

These conditions have proven to be important in terms of establishing and maintaining effective helping relationships.

In counselling, a person is viewed within the stories available to them from family and society. This is in line with the postmodernist perspective which is important because this perspective is the theoretical knowledge this study uses. Gergen (1992, 1994) as cited in Etherington (2001) suggests that counsellors need to explore with clients how their language, constructs and assumptions may influence ways of viewing their problems and identity. This exploration will in turn assist clients to develop new ways for them to cope.

‘Viewing the problem from a different position can free clients from identifying themselves as the problem’ Etherington (2001, p. 251).

McLeod (1999) as cited in Etherington (2001) is of the opinion that counselling is regarded as a social, rather than a psychological process as per the postmodernism perspective.

2.3.3 Personal characteristics of Counselors

A counselor’s personality is important in making sure that the counselling session is effective. Gladding (1996) is of the view that a counselor’s personality is crucial in determining the effectiveness of the counselling process. He stresses the importance of self-therapy in people who want to become counselors, that is, they need to examine themselves first.

Counselors are only “as effective as they are self-aware and able to use themselves as vehicles of change” (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009, p. 60).

It is important for counsellors to care for their emotional self because tracking their own feelings will help them in paying attention to the thoughts and feelings of their clients. This is a critical aspect of counselor self-care. The same view is shared by Etherington (2001, p. 145) who states that “as a wounded healer, the wounds need to be properly healed because to love others one needs to first be able to love oneself”.

Du Preez & Roos (2008) on the other hand maintain that counselors must first know themselves before they can employ any counselling technique successfully.

In their study, the participants stressed the importance of self-reflection as having a positive impact on professional counsellor identity.

The study came to a conclusion that the development process of becoming a counselor has four levels, namely:

- The first level is where counsellors are seen as insecure and dependent;
- The second level is where counsellors are struggling with conflict between dependency and autonomy;
- At level three counsellors experience conditional dependency because they have now developed self-confidence in their profession and greater insight into their motivations of becoming a counsellor;
- At the last level the counsellor has developed personal autonomy.

The question still remains that why do people choose to become counsellors. Hutchinson (2012) is of the opinion that there are all kinds of life experiences and different motivations for wanting to become a counsellor. He mentions five reasons for people to want to become counselors, namely;

- a) Individuals consider becoming counsellors after overcoming some major life difficulties.
- b) The desire to help people is often a curtain of a person searching for a life of meaningful connection, both with self and others.
- c) People want to become counselors because they have a history of personal pain.
- d) An individual has encountered an effective counselors and has the wish to follow in those footsteps.
- e) Others have had bad experience during the counselling process and want to do it better.

2.3.4 Basic counselling skills

When dealing with counselling, it is important to note the issue of counselling skills. Basic skills such as attending skills, listening skills, self-attending skills and action skills are important in the counselling process (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009). Attending skills include eye contact, body language and vocal quality which indicate to others that you are either attending or not attending to them.

Listening skills are important in that the counselors need to be sure that they hear the client accurately by actively listening to them. The basic listening skills that facilitate active listening include client observation and paraphrasing and using open and closed questions (Capuzzi and Gross, 2009). This is significant to this research as interviews are used in a form of asking open ended questions. Self-attending skills are important because counselors who are aware of their own values and beliefs find it easy to help clients explore personal issues. Action skills are important because the counselor and client should have an action plan that suits the client's stated goals.

McLeod & McLeod (2011) suggest that counselling skills may be used for the following reasons:

- To help the client tell their story by being attentive. This is of utmost importance to this study because according to social constructionists, when people tell their

stories the use of language is taken into consideration as it helps in constructing reality;

- To develop the relationship with the client, whereby the counselor conveys a message that he or she cares and believes in the client's capacity to resolve the problems;
- To enable reflection and choice where the counselor helps the client to reflect on what they are experiencing in order to choose whether to take an alternative course of action;
- To create a new experience for a client so that the client feels comfortable and is able to open up.

2.4 South African mental health in relation to the category of Registered Counsellors

The Health Professional Council of South Africa (HPCSA) created the category of registered counsellors to cater for previously disadvantaged communities to access psychological help at a primary level. This category was launched in South Africa in December 2003 (Elkonin & Sandison, 2006).

According to the HPCSA, the role of registered counsellors is to make psychological services accessible to the diverse South African population and to provide psychological and preventative interventions that focus on support and promote the enhancement of wellbeing in community contexts (HPCSA, form 258).

The category was created because of the problems of mental health in South Africa. This is the reason why it is important to highlight the problems of mental health in the South

African context. It is also important to note that registered counsellors differ from other categories of psychology in that their primary function is to prevent, promote, intervene, and appropriately refer.

Since the category was created to deal with problems of mental health issues at a primary level, the concerns voiced by different organisations in terms of mental health problems faced by South Africa will be briefly highlighted.

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her potential. The individual is able to cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make meaningful contribution to his or her community (World Health Organization, WHO, 2004).

According to the South African Department of Health, there have been ongoing challenges that face mental health in South Africa since the end of apartheid.

The department is of the view that the challenges came about because firstly, “there was no officially endorsed National Mental Health Policy; secondly, there is lack of public awareness of mental health and thirdly, mental health care is confined to management of medication for those with severe mental disorders and does not include prevention and treatment of other mental disorders such as depression and anxiety disorder” (Department of Health: National Mental Health Policy Framework and Strategic Plan, NMHPF and Strategic Plan 2013-2020, p. 9).

One of the many activities outlined in the NMHPF and Strategic Plan is the designation of selected health centres and clinics to provide psychological services with appropriate equipment and psychological assessment instruments.

The Professional Board for Psychology of the HPCSA feels that this provides a good opportunity for the profession of psychology to play a meaningful role in the provision of mental health services in South Africa (HPCSA, Psychology news, 2016).

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) (2007) believes that mental health is not given a priority it deserves in South Africa. The organisation is of the view that mental ill health is associated with poverty, exposure to stressful life events such as crime and violence, inadequate housing, unemployment and social conflict. According to Sorsdahl (2010) as cited in Vala (2017), 38% of South African households experience food insufficiency, which can be linked to mental illness. Furthermore, research conducted in 2014 estimated that more than 17 million people in South Africa are living with mental disorders (Vala, 2017).

SADAG's paper on 'The sick state of Mental Health' indicates that one third of the population suffers from mental health issues and 75% will not receive treatment. Furthermore, WHO (2011) found that 75% to 85% of people with mental disabilities do not have access to mental health treatment.

Several other studies have found that many people in South Africa do not have access to mental health facilities. One such study by Elkonin & Sandiso (2006, p. 599) found that "a large of the population has little or no access to psychological services and until

recently the delivery of such services has fallen on the shoulders of registered clinical, counselling and educational psychologists.

According to SADAG, 85% of psychologists are in private practice servicing only 14% of the population. This is a problem since many people cannot access the services of the above mentioned professionals.

Burgess (2012) as cited in Fischer (2017, p. 3- 4) indicates the following five key strategies to scale up services for mental health which were recommended globally:

- Placing mental health on the public health priority agenda;
- Improving the organisation of mental health services;
- Integrating the availability of mental health in general health care;
- Developing human resources for mental health; and
- Strengthening public mental health leadership.

Burns (2011) as cited in Vala (2017, p. 15) describes the “mental health gap” in South Africa, which refers to the lack of resources available to people who require mental health services. This was a gap identified by HPCSA and as a result the category of registered counsellors was created.

There are different models that are dominant voices in terms of trying to define mental illness. Mental illness according to the South African Mental Health Care Act No.17 of 2002, is

“a positive diagnosis of a mental health related illness in terms of accepted diagnostic criteria made by a mental health care practitioner authorised to make such a diagnosis” (Mental Health Care Act, 2002, p. 7).

The following models are highlighted:

2.4.1 Medical Model

The medical model holds that a mental disorder or illness is “a medical disease whose primary symptoms are behavioral rather than anatomical” (Carson, Butcher & Coleman, 1988, p. 54). Neither the psychological nor the psychosocial environment of the individual is believed to play any role in the mental disorder. This model fails to take the wider social environment as a possible source of the problem. It assumes that individuals are not responsible for their problems or solutions and that they only need treatment. Kornblum & Julian (2012) agree and believe that mental illness is the disturbance of normal personality and can be remedied primarily by treating the patient. This is in contradiction with the purpose of counselling which is to enable the client to discover and build on his or her own wisdom (being responsible for their own solutions) rather than have the wisdom imparted to them from the counselor.

According to this model, clients are defined by their pathology or mental illness. They are seen as passive and the therapist (helper) is the primary agent of change (Swain, 1995). This is a challenge in terms of the social constructionist viewpoint that proposes that clients are not passive recipients of a fixed pathological view and condemns the ‘medical voice’ (Stanton, 2005) which is seen as a dominant language in which conversations about mental illness occur. People's personal stories are frequently subjugated and denied in favour of the dominant belief system which tends to pathologise those who do not meet its expectations.

Other definitions include the belief that mental illnesses are like any other illnesses and that they can be treated by specific therapeutic ingredients (Jensen, 2006).

This model can be traced back in psychotherapy with Freud being one of the proponents. Freud was committed to finding a cure for Hysteria which he classified as a mental illness. Freud believed that a doctor diagnoses a patient and administers treatment to cure the illness on the basis of the symptoms identified (Elkins, 2009). The medical model was as a result applied to psychological problems as it was applied to physical illness. One has to bear in mind that Freud was a medical doctor and not a psychologist.

The problem with this model is that mental illness cannot be taken the same as physical illness. For one, in psychotherapy patients got better when they talk about their problems or mental illness. This is in line with social constructionist viewpoint that the aim of intervention is to open up for conversation whereas one cannot get better by talking about their physical illness. Again mental illness is caused by interpersonal difficulties and not pathogens as in physical illness (Elkins, 2009). But the question can still be asked why this model is still used in psychology today. This is because of the type of language used especially in clinical psychology. Terms such as doctor, patients, symptoms, diagnosis and etcetera, are medical terms that make the medical model so popular in this field.

The other reason is the use of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) to diagnose and classify mental disorders.

According to Elkins (2009), Carl Rogers is one of the psychologists who opposed the medical model. For example, Carl Rogers began using terms such as 'clients' instead of 'patients' to describe people who came for therapy.

He did not believe in using diagnostic labels and viewed therapy as an interpersonal relationship where congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy are present (Brammer, Shostrom & Abrego, 1989).

Elkins (2009) sums it up by emphasising the fact that therapy has got nothing to do with medicine. According to him, therapy is about a client having difficulties in life, talking to a professional about it and in turn receiving support and learning skills that will help mitigate the problem. This goes hand in hand with the definition of counselling as provided in the beginning of this chapter.

The medical model does not fit well with this research as this research takes into consideration the social constructionist perspective (this will be discussed in detail in the next chapter). The social constructionists concentrate on the effects of a larger social and cultural context when dealing with clients' problems; reject the notion that clients are passive recipients and regard intervention as a therapeutic conversation which aims to open up a conversation that leads to exchange of ideas where new meanings emerge (Lit & Shek, 2002).

2.4.2 The Health Belief Model

The Health Belief Model (HBM) was developed in the 1950s by social psychologists to explain the failure of people to participate on programs to prevent and detect disease. It later extended to study people's response and behavior to diagnosed illness (Glanz, Rimer & Viswanath, 2008).

This model assumes that the “health behaviours are more or less rationally determined by the person’s vulnerability of a health threat” (Bishop, 1994, p. 82). In other words, specific health behaviours are related to measures of perceived vulnerability as well as perceived benefits of taking action.

The HBM has several concepts that predict why people will take action to prevent or control illness. The concepts are as follow:

Perceived susceptibility refers to the beliefs about the likelihood of getting a disease or condition.

Perceived severity refers to feelings about the seriousness of contracting an illness or leaving it untreated. Both susceptibility and severity are referred to as a threat.

Perceived benefits refer to people’s beliefs regarding the perceived benefits of available actions for reducing the threat. It is important to emphasise that a person’s perceived susceptibility and severity are not expected to accept any recommended health action unless they perceive the action as potentially beneficial by reducing the threat.

Perceived barriers refer to a potentially negative aspect of a particular health action. This acts as a barrier to undertake recommended behaviors. For example, a person who regards consultation fee to a psychologist as expensive, will regard that as a barrier to take action and seek help from a psychologist.

Cues to action refer to cues that instigate health action. For example, public awareness campaigns on mental health. It has been indicated that one of the problems in South Africa is that there is no public awareness in terms of mental health.

Self-Efficacy refers to a “person’s evaluation of his or her ability to perform a task, reach a goal or overcome an obstacle” (Bandura, 1977) as cited in (Baron & Byrne, 1997, p.172).

This construct was initially not included in the HBM. According to Rosenstock, Strecher & Becker (1988), self-efficacy was later included in the HBM because of the importance of efficacy expectation in modifying behavior. Self-efficacy is similar to perceived benefits but the distinction is that of efficacy outcome where a person must feel that he or she is competent to implement the change. This is in line with the process of effective counselling where the main purpose is for the counselor to provide resources for the client to be able to help himself or herself. Therefore it is important for counsellors to promote the concept of self-efficacy in their counselling process. This is in line with the social constructionists principles that emphasise the strength of the clients.

2.4.3 Sociological perspectives

There are various sociological perspectives that try to explain mental health. These differ from the mental health model and the HBM in terms of viewing the connection between human behavior and the society as a whole. Sociological perspectives explore dominant concepts of mental health by locating them within the broader societal context.

Three main sociological perspectives, namely; Interactionist, Functionalist and Conflict will be briefly discussed in terms of how they view mental health and illness and their views about healthcare practitioners.

2.4.3.1 The Interactionist perspective

The Interactionist perspective is concerned with how people create meaning during social interaction. The belief is that health and illness are socially constructed. This perspective is of the view that “the society’s definition of normal and deviant behavior in social situations lead to definitions of mental disorders” (Kornblum & Julian, 2012, p. 70).

It further states that definitions of mental illness lie with psychologists and psychiatrists during diagnosis. This diagnosis results in labels which may cause one to define oneself as ill and behave in ways that confirm this self-definition. Sometimes these are negative labels attached to mental illness which result in stigma.

Leon-Guerrero (2011) cautions against these labels by maintaining that how we use language, words and symbols creates and maintains our social reality.

According to social constructionist perspective, the role of societal context in which people interact plays along with the language that takes place between them (Stanton, 2005). The interactionist perspective is in line with the social constructionist theory in that it focuses on sickness as a social construction rather than a medical condition.

According to this perspective, the healthcare professional should be able to recognise and understand the process of labelling which will in turn help him or her to eradicate the stigma experienced by patients or clients.

The importance of social and emotional support is emphasised alongside medical treatment. This is where the role of registered counsellors features in terms of providing social and emotional support.

Registered counsellors as in their scope of practice must be the first in line to provide psychological support in the community.

2.4.3.2 The Functionalist perspective

The Functionalist perspective views society as a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance, that is, society's different parts working together. This perspective is of the view that "social norms define what counts as illness and how to treat it" (Ballantine & Roberts, 2014, p. 518). Illness is regarded as disruptive to the balanced social world, that is, it constitutes a social problem (Kornblum & Julian, 2012). This is because when members of society fall ill, they take on the sick role. The sick role has been proposed by Parson's theory as a set of behaviors that define the norms and values appropriate to being sick. (Leon-Guerrero, 2011).

According to Parson's theory, the best way to understand illness is to view it as a form of deviance or a threat that disturbs the social function of society. This sick role has four behavioral expectations, namely:

- People who are sick are exempted from fulfilling their normal social roles. In other words, they have a right to be excused from normal social responsibility. Illness allows them to be excused from work, doing household chores and attending school.
- Sick people are not responsible for their illness, therefore, they cannot help being ill. The sick person did not mean to deviate from normal social expectations and cannot be well by self-decision.

- Sick people must try and get well by employing appropriate measures. They should want to get well and must not prolong illness just to avoid social obligations.
- Finally, sick people are expected to visit a healthcare practitioner and follow the advice offered, that is, they are expected to cooperate in getting well.

This perspective maintains that good health and medical care are important in terms of the smooth running of society. Therefore the primary role of healthcare professional is to control illness and prevent individuals from being unable to perform their social roles. That is, they need to help return sick members to a good state of health so that they can serve as functional members of society again.

This shows a connection with the role of registered counsellors which is to support and promote the enhancement of wellbeing of members of the community.

When members of the community are healthy, they become functional members of the community they live in.

2.4.3.3 The Conflict perspective

The Conflict perspective views society as composed of different groups competing for power and resources. According to this perspective, “patterns of health and illness are not accidental or solely the results of the individual’s actions” (Leon-Guerrero, 2011, p. 260). These patterns are solely related to systematic inequalities.

This perspective further asserts that mental illness is associated with inequality and unequal access to appropriate care in terms of poverty, unemployment, low wages and other economic conditions (Kornblum & Julian, 2012, Ballantine & Roberts, 2014, SADAG, 2007).

Capitalism is another concern raised by the conflict perspective. According to the Oxford dictionary, Capitalism is an economic system in which a country's businesses and industry are controlled and run for profit by private owners rather than by the government. Private hospitals may be considered as commercial enterprises and as a result the focus on profit could deny disadvantaged people from accessing health care in those hospitals.

As already mentioned, majority of people in South Africa do not have or cannot afford access to psychological care since majority of healthcare practitioners dealing with psychological problems are in private practice which can only be accessed by fewer people.

It is important to note that one of the reasons the category of registered counsellors was created was to make psychological services accessible to previously disadvantaged groups. In a way, the HPCSA was trying to address the main issues of inequality and unequal access to mental health raised by the conflict perspective.

2.5 Registered Counsellors

The category of registered counsellors was signed into law by the South African minister of health in December 2003 (Elkonin & Sandison, 2006). The main aim of this category was to make psychological services accessible to the diverse of South African population and to provide psychological and preventative interventions that focus on support and promote the enhancement of wellbeing in community contexts (HPCSA, form 258).

Registered counsellors are critical in providing good quality psychological care at primary health care level.

Peterson (as cited in Vala, 2017) emphasises the importance of registered counsellors which includes easing the burden placed on other mental health care professionals such as social workers and psychologists by decreasing their workload within the community context. Pretorius (2013) as cited in Fischer (2017, p. 9) describes the category saying:

‘They will provide a workforce to address the South African problems in the South African society, prevent mental health problems, and enhance wellbeing and development. Registered counsellors will also make primary psychological services on grass root level accessible and available’.

Registered counsellors differ from other categories of psychology in that their primary function is “to prevent, promote, intervene and appropriately refer. Their primary role at a preventative and promotional level involves screening and engaging early and appropriate levels of intervention” (HPCSA, form, 258, p. 2).

The HPCSA clearly states that registered counsellors differ from psychologists as psychologists work on a more complex and specialised level.

For example, registered counsellors can only perform psychological assessments excluding “neuropsychological and diagnostic tests” which can only be performed by psychologists (Health Professions Act, 56 of 1974).

It is important to highlight the scope of practice for registered counsellors as proposed by HPCSA (Form 258) so that people do not confuse it with that of other practitioners in the Psychology field. Registered counsellors are expected to perform the following duties:

Psychological screening, basic assessment and technically limited psychological interventions with individuals and groups, aiming at enhancing personal functioning in a

variety of contexts including education, work, sport, non-governmental organisations, Non Profit Organisations(NPO) and community.

More specifically, the registered counsellor will manage complete sub-elements of intervention programmes with associated interventions; design sub-elements of intervention programmes and processes; execute less advanced, more structured interventions.

Registered counsellor will be the first line of community based psychological support; providing preventative and developmental counselling services; performing supportive psychological interventions to enhance emotional functioning and mental well-being; performing basic psychological screening for the purpose of mental health as a preliminary screening tool in order to refer appropriately; developing preventative and developmental interventions on all systems levels; design, implement and monitor preventative and developmental programmes appropriate for all systems levels; provide counselling in conjunction with interdisciplinary support teams and report in writing and provide feedback to clients on interventions.

2.6 Recent studies on Registered Counsellors

A limited number of research studies has been done in terms of the professionals who are in the registration category of registered counsellors.

The study done by Elkonin & Sandiso (2006) focuses mainly on employment opportunities of BPsych graduates and their success in registering and finding work within the profession. Their findings included that many BPsych graduates had difficulty with

registration as counsellors and only 19, 3% from their sample had registered with HPCSA. One of the reasons for non-registration was that some graduates did not write the Professional Board Exams.

When coming to the issue of employability they found that only a small portion had been employed as registered counsellors.

Many registered counsellors were of the opinion that finding employment as a registered counsellor was “an almost impossible task” as many were working in other professional sectors because they had made a career change (Elkonin & Sandiso 2006, p. 607). They also found that some graduates did not register with HPCSA because there was confusion or lack of clarity pertaining to private practice. From their study they recommended for an advocacy to increase public knowledge of this category.

In yet another study, Elkonin & Sandison (2010) were more interested in perceptions of registered counsellor efficacy. An outstanding finding was that supervisors rated registered counsellors as very effective, reliable and competent but the downside was that there were still few posts made available for registered counsellors, despite the positive and important role that registered counsellors were playing. The role of supervision in terms of supporting graduates while in practicum was stressed. Other findings were that registered counsellors were aware of their competency as a result they were self-monitoring.

Abel & Louw (2009) on the other hand, investigated the state of registered counsellors in the professional work of psychology. They found that a relatively low number of

counselors have registered since the creation of the category (Elkonin & Sandison, 2006). This is a problem considering the reasons why the category was created.

As with previous research, many of their respondents stated that it had been “very difficult” or “fairly difficult” to find employment as registered counsellors (Elkonin & Sandison, 2006, p. 103).

Their findings were both negative and positive. On the positive side they found that some registered counsellors were working within the profession and making a positive contribution to the mental healthcare system. On the negative side they found that some registered counsellors had moved to alternative career fields or have continued to study Master's degree in Psychology because they viewed the registration as a stepping stone to become a psychologist. This was due to the fact that it was difficult to find employment as a registered counsellor as agreed by Elkonin & Sandison (2006).

They also found that there is a lack of public and professional knowledge of the scope of practice and finally there is an urgent need for marketing the profession to make the public aware of what is on offer.

In another study, Abel & Louw (2007) investigated the current situation of registered counsellors in South Africa. One important finding revealed that few registered counsellors were found to be working in their profession. Of the 46% from the sample, half was working in private practice and another half in NGOs. Respondents indicated the difficulty of finding work within this category.

Another finding showed a significant difference between institutions where registered counsellors studied in terms of their success in finding employment in this category. They

found that respondents working as registered counsellors wanted to qualify as psychologists one day.

Rouillard, Wilson & Weideman (2016) were concerned with how registered counsellors perceived their role of providing mental health-care services in the South African context. In their findings, themes such as reasons for acquiring the qualification, perceptions of their role and misperception and disregard of their role occurred. On the issue of the reasons for acquiring the qualification it was found that many had a desire to help other people who experienced psychological challenges and some were not able to follow their original plans to become psychologists, hence they went for registered counsellor qualification.

On the issue of how they perceive their role it emerged that their role was very essential since people have commented that registered counsellors' services are more cost-effective.

The negative side was that counsellors were unsure of their role because the scope of practice keeps changing. They felt that there was lack of information given by the HPCSA which has caused insecurity within the profession.

Their participants indicated that there was a lack of clarity in terms of the context in which registered counsellors should be working and the type of mental health problems they should be assisting with.

Another finding was that the public was unaware of this profession and other health care professionals did not know what the role of registered counsellors was, that is, they found the role of registered counsellors confusing and vague.

Furthermore, Vala (2017) conducted a study about registered counsellors' experiences of their professional career development. Among other findings was that supervision was seen as a valuable aspect of the practicum training. Professional growth was attributed to positive and negative feedback received from supervisors. Many displayed a passion for the field of psychology. It was also revealed that participants experienced anxiety during their journey towards becoming counselors. This was due to limited knowledge of counselling skills, but the anxiety tends to decrease as they treated more clients. As with findings of research mentioned previously, many of their participants also expressed a desire to pursue a Master's degree in Psychology.

Fisher (2017) on the other hand, researched about the current status, professional identity and training realities of registered counsellors. There were negative and positive findings. On the negative side the study indicated that since the number of registered counsellors as compared to the South African population is not proportioned, it can be concluded that registered counsellors did not help much in scaling up mental help care. It was also found that the institutional regulatory, as instituted by HPCSA in terms of BPsych training, has decreased the number of institutions offering registered counsellor training. This was due to among other factors, the employment challenges faced by the category of registered counsellors. Another downside expressed was a lack of clarity in terms of where the registered counsellors fit within the broader profession of psychology.

On the contrary it was found that some registered counsellors “expressed a sense of excitement about their aspiration and vision to be a registered counselor” (Fisher 2017, p. 203). Some also enjoyed doing the work of registered counsellor despite their employment status as registered counsellor.

Furthermore, some articles have recently been written about the category of registered counsellors. One such article is from the Psychological Society of South Africa (PSYSSA); in the division of Registered Counsellors and Psychometrists (RCP), whereby they responded to an article by Prof.HG Pretorius titled ‘HPCSA: Understanding the role of Registered Counsellor in the profession of Psychology in South Africa.’ Psychology Society of South Africa (2015). According to the RCP, the article amongst other matters claimed the following:

- That the category of registered counsellors was often misunderstood and that these professionals were trained to act as mini-psychologists;
- That the purpose of registered counsellors is to act as ‘emotional paramedics’ in cases of trauma;
- That a BPsych curriculum is an intergraded one and cannot be achieved (as erroneously believed) by adding a six month internship to an academic honours degree.

In their response which is available on the PSYSSA website, the RCP maintains the following:

- That there is no factual evidence to back the first point about registered counsellors being misunderstood to being trained as ‘mini psychologists’. This, they regard as

a personal opinion from the author of the article and not a professional opinion.

They referred to HPCSA Form 236 in terms of the minimum exposure which registered counsellors must obtain;

- That the term 'emotional paramedics' does not appear in any document from the HPCSA and not in any HPCSA document relating to the category of registered counsellors. RCP believes that this term undermines the scope of practice of a registered counsellor and gives a false impression to the South African public about what registered counsellors must provide in terms of their services;
- Refers to HPCSA Form 258 under the heading "Options for offering the Psych programme" in responding to the third bullet above.

Another article posted by the South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP) on their website discussed the untapped potential of registered counsellors in South Africa. The article discusses the importance of registered counsellors in providing community based psychological intervention.

It states that some of the barriers preventing registered counsellors to participate as mental defense force is the employment barriers experienced by registered counsellors and the scope of practice that they have to adhere to.

The above studies and articles show some negatives and positives in terms of the category of registered counsellors, but still do not address the main aim of this study which is to know the reasons why people choose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance and future is in the South African context.

2.7 Conclusion

The literature review gives an understanding of the history of counselling in terms of the movements that pushed for counselling to become a profession that has credentials. Counselling is viewed as a helping relationship and from the different definitions of counselling provided, it is a clear indication that the main aim of counselling is to help clients to help themselves. This, the counsellor can achieve by providing resources and conditions in which the client can thrive. Literature on the components and characteristics of a helping relationship helped to give a deeper understanding of this relationship.

It is clear from the literature review that counselling skills are important for the client to be able to “tell their stories” which is in line with the social constructionist theoretical framework. The kind of personality one should possess to become an effective counselor was also highlighted. It is important to note that literature has proved that counsellors should first check their emotional being before they can be able to help others. Self-therapy is therefore very important.

Reasons why some people choose to become counselors were briefly highlighted. It is important to note that the researcher's experience as a registered counsellor has coloured the choice of literature on counselling.

Mental Health is an important aspect in terms of this study. The challenges of Mental Health issues in the South African context were discussed as highlighted by different organisations. It is important to highlight these issues since there is a direct link between registered counsellors and mental health in South Africa.

The main aim for the creation of the category of registered counsellors was to make sure that people, especially the previously disadvantaged groups, access mental health care at primary level.

Different models in terms of explaining mental health and illness were briefly discussed. This is to bring attention to the fact that different institutions view mental illness differently. This influences how they treat mental illness.

Since this research is employing the Social constructionist viewpoint, it was necessary to discuss the sociological perspectives on mental illness as they locate it within the broader societal context. Three main sociological perspectives were discussed in terms of how they view mental health and illness and how they view the role of healthcare professionals.

The category of registered counsellors was briefly discussed as per the HPCSA's requirements. This was done by explaining the reasons why the category was created and what is the prescribed scope of work for registered counsellors. It is clear from this discussion that the HPCSA is the custodian of this category as they prescribe training and registration of these health care professionals.

Recent studies conducted for the category of registered counsellors, that is, studies conducted between 2007 and 2017 were discussed and reviewed. This is crucial for one to get an idea of what registered counsellors think about their profession and how they view their profession in terms of addressing the reasons the category was created. It was clear from the results that there are positive and negative views about this profession.

One main negative view is that of challenges in terms of work opportunities created for registered counsellors. This may be because the public is not clued up in terms of the scope of work of registered counsellors.

It is also clear that all these studies do not answer the main question for this research; which is to know why people choose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance is in the South African context. It is therefore important to conduct this research to address the question and pave way for future research in this area.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

EPISTEMOLOGY

“Whenever one thinks, one makes assumptions. It is not possible to think in a ‘neutral’ way without the thinking being directed by the ways we had learned to think”. (Fourie, 1998, p. 11).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the theory of knowledge that is used in this study. Firstly, the term paradigm will be explained; secondly, three paradigms will be outlined to set the stage to discuss the epistemological framework that fits this study.

The term epistemology is defined in terms of definitions given by different sources. Modernism, the epistemology of cybernetics and postmodernism are going to be highlighted. Finally, social constructionism will be discussed in detail and the reason why it was chosen as well as how it will be applied to this study will also be explained.

3.2 Paradigms

Paradigms comprise a researcher’s view of social reality in general. They consist of philosophical components such as ontology and epistemology (Hesse-Biber, 2017). “Paradigms are general frameworks through which to see life. They provide a set of assumptions about the nature of reality” (Govender, 2014, p. 53). Ontology is all about the nature of reality and epistemology is all about who can be a knowledge builder.

Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) describe three paradigms which will be described below.

3.2.1 *Positivist paradigm*

Positivism is an epistemological position which is of the view that knowledge of a social phenomenon is based on what can be observed and recorded rather than subjective understandings (Matthews & Ross, 2010). The positivist social thought emanated in the late 1800 and it is sometimes referred to as the scientific method.

Researchers using this theory of knowledge “frame their research questions as hypothesis that set up casual relationships between variables” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 22). Their assumptions about knowledge is that there exist truth independent of the research process. This theory of knowledge defines the researcher as detached from the subject being studied (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The researcher has to practice objectivity in carrying out a research project, that is, the researcher must remain objective and not intervene in the process of investigation. They advocate a “strong separation of the researcher’s values and attitudes from his or her research projects” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 43). The researcher has the privilege of being the sole authority in the research process because of her objective stance and her use of standardised measurement instruments.

The methodology relies on control and manipulation of reality; it is usually quantitative in nature, usually using experimental designs that involve hypothesis testing. This methodology aims at providing an accurate description of the laws that govern reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

3.2.2 Interpretive paradigm

The interpretive paradigm believes that the reality to be studied consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Interpretivist approach stresses the importance of people's subjective interpretations and understanding of social phenomenon. The main focus of this theory of knowledge is on how people interpret the social world to allow different perspectives to be explored. The researcher's point of view, biases, and personal experiences that impact on the study must be explored and addressed (Creswell, 2007).

3.2.3 The constructionist paradigm

The constructionist paradigm sees reality as socially constructed. This means that reality is created by the observer (Stanton, 2005).

The constructionist paradigm "sees the purpose of research as to authentically understand multiple constructions of what is considered to be real" (Lapan et al, 2012, p. 22). Constructionists emphasise the reflection of own experiences to construct an understanding of the world in which we live in.

In other words, people create subjective meanings of their experiences and the world within the social, cultural and historical context in which their lives are embedded (Lapan et al, 2012).

3.3 What is Epistemology?

Matthews & Ross (2010) define epistemology as the theory of knowledge of how we know things. In other words, it is the study of ways of knowing about the world.

Hesse-Biber (2017, p. 6) describes epistemology as “a philosophical belief system about who can be a knowledge builder. It includes how the relationship between the researcher and research participants is understood”.

Epistemology asks questions about knowledge and how knowledge is acquired (Lapan, et al, 2012).

Denzin & Lincoln (2000, p. 157) as cited in Stanton (2005) state that epistemology asks, how do I know the world, what is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Every epistemology implies an ethical – moral stance towards the world and the self of the researcher.

3.4 The Newtonian or Modernistic Epistemology

The modern epistemology is also referred to as the Newtonian epistemology. Its assumption is that knowledge can be obtained objectively and be known universally (Stanton, 2005). Scientists such as Aristotle, Descartes and Newton, were in the forefront in terms of influencing this thinking about science. They ascribe to three assumptions, namely; reductionism, linear causality and neutral objectivity.

3.4.1 Reductionism

This assumption points to the fact that to understand an object, it has to be reduced to its basic elements (Fourie, 1998). These elements are often measurable and easier to understand.

Once the building blocks and their characteristics are known, it is easier to understand the whole. The assumption is that this procedure will help the researchers or observers of phenomena to the absolute truths about the reality out there that needs to be discovered (Stanton, 2005) and once this reality is discovered, one is able “to make inferences and predictions about human behavior” (Stanton, 2005, p. 46).

3.4.2 Linear causality

The assumption here is that the elements are regarded as being connected to one another through cause and effect. There is a belief that one part or element causes the other (Fourie, 1998).

An example is a study conducted on a population of people regarded as counsellors. The study found that according to the norm of a sample there have been particular life events resulting in people wanting to become counsellors. The conclusion can, for example, be given that if a person goes through a particular life event such as being abused as a child, he or she will want to become a counsellor. This cause and effect reasoning limits possible outcomes of people’s reactions to these particular life events.

3.4.3 Neutral objectivity

The assumption is that what an object or phenomenon being observed is really like if one does not influence it (Fourie, 1998).

The belief is that one should observe phenomenon objectively in order to arrive at the truth. The implication is that the observer stands separate from that which is being observed and that does not have any influence over it (Stanton, 2005). The modernistic belief is that a single and knowable reality is in existence.

Becvar & Becvar, 2000 as cited in (Stanton, 2005) conclude that this thinking assumes that the mind is believed to exist independently from this reality, which allows the observer to observe reality without any influence.

3.5 A move away from Modernism.

The focus on the interconnectedness of parts and patterns became important with the shift from modernism. The focus now is placing ourselves outside the system as observers of what is happening inside the system (Becvar & Becvar, 1996).

The concern here is about the characteristics patterns of interaction in the system, what forms the boundaries of the system and distinguishes it from other systems, the degree of openness or closedness of these boundaries, the balance between stability and change and the tendency of the system to move either towards or away from the order (Becvar & Becvar, 1996).

Two ways of thinking emerged from this shift, namely; simple cybernetics and cybernetics of cybernetics.

3.5.1 Simple cybernetics

This is also known as general systems thinking. According to Becvar & Becvar (1996), the following are the fundamental beliefs of simple cybernetics:

- Recursion - The focus is on the “interaction between people as opposed to a focus on the individual or phenomenon in isolation” (Stanton, 2005, p. 51). We no longer ask the question ‘why’ because the interest is not in the cause.

People and events are seen in the context of mutual interaction and mutual influence (Becvar & Becvar, 1998).

The systems and individuals influence each other recursively, that is, every individual is being influenced by every other individual;

- Feedback - refers to “the process whereby information about past behaviors is fed back into the system in a crucial manner” (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p. 64). This implies that “information about the output from a system can be channeled back to the system by the environment or by other systems in the environment” (Fourie, 1998, p.14).

Positive and negative feedback point to the impact that certain behavior can have on a system and the manner in which the system responds to the behavior (Stanton, 2005);

- Morphostasis / Morphogenesis- refers to the “system’s ability to remain stable when facing change and to change in the context of stability. Both are necessary because stability will always be rooted to underlying processes of change” (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p. 66). A good balance between the two states is important for the system to function healthily;
- Rules and boundaries- the system’s rules are what distinguishes it from other systems and they are said to form boundaries of a system;

- Openness and closedness- this refers to the extent to which a system takes out and allows the input of new information into the system. An appropriate balance between the two is important and desirable for a healthy functioning (Becvar & Becvar, 1998);
- Entropy and Negentropy - When we say the balance between openness and closedness is appropriate, then surely being too open or too closed will be dysfunctional. According to Becvar & Becvar (1996), in either extreme the system may be said to be in a state of entropy and when an appropriate balance between openness and closedness is maintained, the system is in a state of negentropy;
- Equifinality and Equipotentiality- these are concepts that lead a person to ask the question 'what?' because the process is looked at, instead of sequence of cause and effect that is often traced back into past events (Stanton, 2005). The system as it is, is said to "be at its own best explanation regardless of where one begins, the end will be the same" (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p. 69);
- Communication and Information processing- here, the interactional patterns between people are a focus of observation. The belief here is that "one can never not do anything, even doing nothing is doing something" (Becvar and Becvar, 1996, p. 70). This implies that all behavior in the context of others have a message. For example, when one is sitting silently, a message is conveyed to the observer. The message can be interpreted in different ways and no one's interpretation is more correct than the other.

The manner in which communication occurs and how information is shared among people, point to the relationship and wholeness aspects of the system. The interaction and relationship within the context become the focus.

3.5.2 *Cybernetics of cybernetics*

This is also known as second order cybernetics. This is a move where one is no longer just an observer but a participant in that which is observed. The first principle is that it is a move away from the observer being described as objective.

The very act of observation influenced the behaviour of the people under observation; and observation is coloured by the observer's way of observing and his or her epistemology or way of thinking (Fourie 1998). The observer thus looks at the observed reality from his or her perspective which clearly points to the fact that objective observation is not possible.

The second principle is a move from the notion that systems are self-deterministic (Stanton, 2005). This means that systems are more closed for information than open for information. The principle of second order cybernetics focuses on the autonomy of the system. The system is autonomous in regulating and conserving itself. It "reacts to perturbations only in ways that it can react. It cannot be linearly influenced from outside" (Fourie 1998, p. 16).

The second order cybernetics frameworks make a shift to postmodernism. According to postmodernism, the possibility is that more than one perception may be possible and therefore holds the notion that multiple realities or accounts of reality exist (Stanton, 2005). Postmodernists view language as a means by which individuals come to know and

simultaneously construct their world. Conversation is also seen as the ultimate context within which knowledge can be understood.

It is important to make a mention of postmodernism because this study will employ the postmodern theoretical stance known as 'social constructionism'.

3. 6 A postmodern Epistemology

Postmodernism questions people who were previously known as knowledgeable who supposedly possess the truth about reality out there (Becvar & Becvar, 1996). Gergen (cited in Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p. 88) is of the view that in the postmodern world "clients must also be understood as possessing equally valid perspectives and we must become aware that there is no transcendent criterion of the correct".

Postmodern view is also based on the notion that no one true reality exists, and all realities are not equally valid (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, Fourie, 1998). They also acknowledge the use of language. Stanton (2005) is of the view that the knowledge which we live by is believed to be an expression of language (Stanton, 2005). We cannot speak in a language separate from that of ours in which we live.

The postmodern recognises that "the self is not isolated, autonomous being, but rather is constructed in relationship" (Becvar & Becvar, 1996, p. 89). This means that the self is thus regarded in terms of an ongoing process whereby it is continually constructed and reconstructed in relationships over time (Stanton, 2005).

It is important to discuss constructivism in order to distinguish it from Social Constructionism which is the theory of knowledge that this study will follow. A brief discussion of constructivism will follow.

3.7 Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory that believes that the observer gives meaning to that which he or she observes. As Fourie (1998, p. 16) puts it, “according to constructivism what we observe is at least partially constructed by us”. This basically means that reality is created by the observer. Furthermore, constructivism is of the view that a person’s perception of reality is seen as being equal to any other person’s perception of reality (Stanton, 2005). This theory further fails to recognise that the larger social reality may influence the manner in which meaning is created and reality is constructed.

The need for inclusion of the role of cultural context and social relationships in constructing reality led to the social constructionism theory.

3.8 Social Constructionism

There seem to be a vast difference between social constructionism and constructivism. They both acknowledge that more than one reality exists (Stanton, 2005). However, social constructionism takes into account the effects of a larger social and cultural context and concurs with the fact that perceptions of reality are not equally valid. Social constructionism also highlights the social, historical and collective nature of human consciousness (Durrheim, 1997).

Owen (cited in Rapmund, 2000, p. 106) defines social constructionism as follows:

“The claim and viewpoint that the content of our consciousness and the mode of relating we have to others, is taught by our culture and society: All the metaphysical qualities we take for granted are learned from others around us” (Owen, 1992:386) as cited in Rapmund (2000).

Gergen (as cited in Stanton, 2005) discusses four fundamentals of social constructionist perspectives, namely:

- What we know about the world is determined by the language and concepts we have to define it;
- Concepts and categories by which the world is comprehended are as a result of historically situated interchanges among people;
- Sustained understandings and beliefs are dependent on unexpected changes of social processes;
- Descriptions and explanations of the world are important in social life because they are part of activities in which people engage.

Social constructionists believe that multiple versions of reality are equally valid accounts of truth. They believe that through daily interactions between people, we construct knowledge and understanding of the world.

This is what strongly motivated the researcher to choose this approach because when interacting with the participants during the interviews, we have constructed knowledge and understanding of the world in terms of why they chose to become registered counsellors. This social interaction and more importantly language is of great interest to social constructionists (Burr, 1995).

Language is more than just a way of connecting people. It is when people talk to each other and the world gets constructed. Durrheim (1997) concurs because he believes that human life is constituted in language and that language should be the object of study.

During the interviews the participants were afforded time to express themselves as they wished. By expressing themselves through language, the researcher got an idea of how the world in which the participants live is constructed.

Corey, 2001 (as cited in Stanton, 2005) states that the social constructionism is of the view that reality is based on the use of language and reality and language is a function of the situations in which people live. All of these prove the importance of language as a cornerstone to the social constructionists' belief.

Social constructionists furthermore reject the issue of objectivity and strongly regard it as an impossibility (Burr, 2015; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The idea of objectivity "implies that a human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all" (Burr, 2015, p. 172). According to social constructionists the researcher is subjectively involved in the work being investigated than being objective and detached from the process of inquiry.

This is relevant to this study because the researcher is firstly, involved by being the one to come with the interview questions, that is, the researcher's own assumptions informed what type of questions are to be asked.

Questions are always derived from assumptions about the world. Secondly, the researcher's familiarity with the context, in this case being a registered counselor, acknowledges her involvement in the research process and the part this will play in the findings.

The three main assumptions of social constructionist that informed this research, which are; the role of language, the co-construction of meaning and the role of societal context will be briefly discussed.

3.8.1 The role of language

Social constructionism views language as a crucial part of constructing reality. We construct particular accounts of what the world is like when we think and talk about the world (Burr, 2015). As mentioned in previous chapters that the researcher in this study listens to the stories told by respondents, language is taken into consideration during the interviews. This is true as Anderson & Goolishian (cited in Stanton, 2005, p. 64) state that "we understand ourselves and others through changing stories and self-descriptions".

It is further believed that "we live with each other in a world of conversational narratives and that reality exists within conversation between the knower and the known" (Stanton, 2005, p. 64). The researcher in this study aims to be in conversational space with these people who construct themselves as registered counsellors.

Doan (1999) as cited in (Stanton, 2005) is of the view that social constructionists believe that a researcher prefers stories that are based on the participant's lived experiences rather than an expert knowledge.

The participants in this study tell their stories about their life experiences as these stories help to address the research question on why they chose to become registered counsellors. This approach allows each participant to share their subjective accounts of their life experiences.

This theory of knowledge is relevant for this study because the main aim of this study is to know why people decided to become registered counsellors and what their relevance is in the South African context. This is addressed by listening to life stories and lived experiences of participants.

3.8.2 Co-construction of meaning

Social constructionists are of the opinion that researchers must view the research process as co-production between themselves and the people they are researching (Burr, 2015).

This means that social constructionists place an emphasis on how meaning is created in conversations with others (external social processes) rather than coming from within the individual's own point of view (internal personal processes) .

Fourie (1998) stresses that when two or more observers agree on their observations, they have co-constructed a particular reality for themselves. This co-constructed reality exists in the domain of shared meanings.

The researcher in this study acknowledges that when she and the respondents learn the meanings they assign to counselling, reality will be co-constructed through knowledge gained. Stanton (2005) concurs that this approach allows for multiple realities to emerge and be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants.

The researcher is aware that through her involvement in the conversations and her own experience as a registered counsellor, she is likely to colour the interview process and the final outcome of the study. This means that the researcher views the study as being co-constructed between herself and the participants.

3.8.3 The role of the societal context

Social constructionists believe that people are born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used by the people in our culture already exist. Our ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality but from other people's past and present (Burr, 2015). Subjective reality is achieved through socialisation.

This means that the people construct meaning in social interactions with others. The social communities in which people live create particular meanings and attitude for them to live by (Stanton, 2005). This involves being given an identity and a place in society.

The relevance to this study is that through the interviews the researcher will gain knowledge on how or what the society in which the participants live views counselling or the role of counselors. Do they view counsellors as people with psychological wounds who are inspired to become wounded healers or do they view counsellors as mental health workers?

As pointed out earlier that when people agree with each other about an observation, reality is constructed, the relevance of this in the study is that the researcher and the respondents might agree on an observation in terms of counselling. The issue is that since the researcher is a counsellor herself, there is a high likeliness of some agreement of observation in terms of why people follow counselling as a career.

This reasoning is likely to be coloured by historical and community beliefs. When communicating with respondents, the researcher in this study gets an understanding of what counselling means to each participant and how it impacts them in their lives.

Social constructionists do not focus on the individual's verbal accounts but rather on the interactions and relationship among members of the social community to co-construct reality. However, it is sometimes thought that this means that any reality can be constructed, a kind of "anything goes" approach (Fourie, 1998, p. 16).

This co-constructed reality must fit with the ideas that participants have about themselves, that is, it has to fit in the system and their unique reality (Stanton, 2005). The reason for this is because such co-constructed realities exist because of shared meaning.

This is applied in this study by the researcher guarding against enforcing her own account of reality on the participants, mainly because of her experiences as a registered counsellor. The aim is to engage in conversations with participants during which realities occur. The voices of people who construct themselves as registered counsellors are heard, while at the same time the researcher and participants learn from each other in terms of reasons why people decided to become registered counsellors.

Social constructionists are aware that dominant voices or accounts of reality exist within communities. According to Doan (1997) as cited in (Stanton, 2005), dominant voices are supported by the numbers, tradition and existing power structures in the community. These dominant voices sometimes advocate a specific norm or way of life.

Social constructionists caution against this. Rapmund (2000, p. 107) concurs that “people’s personal stories are frequently subjugated and denied in favour of the dominant belief system which tends to pathologise those who do not meet its expectations”.

The researcher in this study aims to listen to those non-dominant stories that participants tell, as they may contain possibilities of answers to the research question and new reality can be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. Social constructionists therefore warn against singular accounts whose power tends to further silence, exclude and treat as insignificant to those whose stories fail to fit.

It prefers "stories that are based on a person's lived experience" rather than on "expert knowledge" (Doan, 1997, p. 130) as cited in Rapmund, 2000. In this study the dominant voice about counselling may be that of the Health Professional Council of South Africa (HPCSA) since it is the council that dictates who qualifies to be a registered counsellor. Therefore, our knowledge about a registered counselor may be influenced by the reality created by the HPCSA.

Other dominant voices in terms of counselling or becoming a counselor might be the many books and research done on the subject.

The researcher in this study gives the participants a space to voice out those non-dominant stories about their reasons for becoming registered counsellors. Those non-dominant voices are extremely important because they might help to co-construct reality between the researcher and participants.

It is therefore prudent to mention that this study follows all the fundamental perspectives of the social construction theory of knowledge. The suitability and application of this theory of knowledge will continue to be highlighted on the next chapter.

3.9 Conclusion

The shift away from modernist epistemology sets the stage for a discussion of postmodernism. Social constructionism that falls under postmodernism epistemology is a suitable theoretical framework for this study as discussed in the above paragraphs. Since social constructionists view this issue as co-constructing reality between the researcher and respondents, this may hold the key in answering the research question on why people choose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance is in the South African context. It is through the interviews and conversations with the respondents that the researcher gives the respondents' space to voice their life stories.

The researcher acknowledges that her experience as a registered counsellor is likely to colour the interview process. Nevertheless, the researcher guards against imposing her views on the respondents and makes sure that the respondents' voices are heard.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The following chapter entails a discussion on the research methodology that is employed in this study. This includes the definitions of research methodology from different researchers, the discussion about the research design, data collection method and issues of ethical considerations.

All of the above are discussed in terms of how they are deemed appropriate and relevant for this study.

4.2 What is Research Methodology?

According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999, p. 6), methodology in research can be defined “as a way in which the researcher studies whatever he or she believes can be made known. It is a plan on which you decided how the study will be executed”. On the other hand, Dawson (2002, p. 22) defines research methodology as “the philosophy or general principle which guides research”.

Methodologies are also linked to paradigms. That is, they refer to the way in which the researcher looks at the world out there (Stanton, 2005).

Various methods are used in research studies. A comparison between qualitative and quantitative methods will be outlined to set a platform on why the qualitative method will be used for this study. Qualitative research attempts to get in-depths opinion from participants and fewer people take part in the research while quantitative research generates statistics by using large-scale research (Dawson, 2002).

Qualitative approach is often used when the problem has not been investigated before and often uses smaller samples. (Bless, Smith & Sithole, 1988).

According to Merriam (2009) as cited in Makhafula (2016), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people make sense of their world taking into account experiences of the world.

On the other hand quantitative researchers are mostly interested in testing hypothesis in controlled ways so as to generate findings in a statistical manner (Stanton, 2005). Dawson (2002) is of the opinion that neither one method is better than the other. The researcher needs to choose a method that is most appropriate to answer the research question.

This study employs the qualitative research perspective in order to explore behavior and experience. This is relevant to this study since the researcher is interested in the stories (lived experience) from the participants as summarised by Merriam (cited in Lapan et al, 2012, p. 8) below:

“Rather than determining cause and effect, predicting or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population.... [qualitative researchers] might be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for those involved... [by] understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they attribute to their experiences”.

Qualitative research does not prescribe a fixed set of procedures according to which to conduct the research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, Creswell, 2007). It allows the researcher flexibility for in case new information emerges during the research.

However, there are characteristics that make up qualitative research (Creswell, 2007) and this study takes those characteristics into consideration when dealing with the research design.

4.3 The Research Design

A research design means looking back at the research questions and thinking about what you want to do with the data collected in order to be able to address the research questions (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Research design in qualitative research is an ongoing process (Maxwell, 2005). This means that it does not proceed through a fixed sequence of steps. A qualitative research design is selected in this study in order to explore behavior and experiences. This is important because this study aims to generate information from the participants themselves as stated in Dawson (2002, p. 14) that qualitative methods “attempt to get an in-depth opinion from the participant”.

According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) qualitative approach allows one to inquire into personal stories and meanings of persons and it is not interested with generalising findings to a larger population.

Creswell (2007) believes that qualitative research design contains several characteristics. According to Creswell, the following are the main characteristics of qualitative research:

- Natural setting
- Researcher as the key instrument
- Multiple sources of data
- Emergent design
- Theoretical lens

- Interpretive Inquiry
- Holistic account
- Participants meaning.

The above characteristics will be discussed in no particular order to indicate how they are applied in this study.

Natural setting – Qualitative researchers “conduct their studies where participants live and work” (Creswell, 2007, p. 18). This is important because it helps the researcher to get a better understanding of what participants are saying since participants need to feel at ease to voice their stories. According to Creswell (2007, p. 37), qualitative researchers “do not bring participants to a lab”. What they do is to collect data from the place where participants experience the problem under study. This helps in that the researcher talks directly with participants to see how they behave and act within their contexts. This fits in with the social constructionists’ viewpoint as they “value data collected in context with minimal disturbance to the natural setting” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 152). The researcher in this study conducts the interviews at the participants’ own context so that she is able to have a smooth face-to-face interaction with them. This helps participants to feel free to voice their lived experiences.

Researcher as key instrument- Qualitative researchers collect data themselves. They use data collection methods such as interviews and observing behavior. These researchers gather the information themselves and do not rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers (Creswell, 2007).

This is applicable to this study since the researcher uses interviews as a data collection method. This fits well with the social constructionists' theoretical stance that promotes the issue of the researcher's involvement in the phenomenon that is being studied.

According to social constructionists, the researcher is subjectively involved in the work that is being investigated than being objective and detached from the process of inquiry (Burr, 2015). Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999, p. 46) are in agreement with this view that qualitative researchers reject reliable and objective measures as invalid because "social phenomena are context-dependent and the meaning of whatever the researcher is investigating depends on the particular situation that an individual is in". The researcher in this study is subjectively involved in the phenomena that is being studied. This is so because firstly, she is the one that comes up with interview questions as her own assumptions which inform the type of questions to be asked; secondly, as a registered counsellor her experience is taken into consideration when co-constructing reality with participants.

Denzin & Lincoln (2000) as cited in (Stanton, 2005) are of the view that qualitative researchers often draw upon their own experiences as a resource during their research. This is also relevant to this study because the researcher as a registered counsellor herself takes into consideration her own experience. The researcher acknowledges that how she conducts the interviews and reconstructs the findings may be coloured by her own views as a registered counsellor and may be influenced by her social context and language that resemble the broader cultural context of which she has been part of. This fits in with the social constructionist's point of view that allows for multiple realities to come out and be co-constructed between the researcher and the participants.

Another important factor about qualitative researchers is that they are required to have the ability to observe behavior and have good face-to-face interviewing skills.

This is true as Maxwell (2013) stresses that for the interview to be useful, the researcher needs to ask questions about specific events and actions, rather than asking questions that elicit generalisations.

The researcher in this study does not regard herself as an expert but a person trying to understand the experiences of registered counsellors.

Multiple sources of data- Qualitative researchers gather multiple forms of data as compared to a single data source (Creswell, 2007). The researcher in this study subscribes to this notion by gathering data through interviews, notes and using a tape recorder. The participants were asked for their permission or consent before a tape recorder could be used. All these data was reviewed and organised into themes to make sense of the reality that was co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. The researcher also included data from the literature review because the findings from this study will be compared to the findings from relevant literature to make informed conclusion and recommendations.

Emergent design- The initial plan of qualitative research cannot be tightly prescribed. According to Stanton (2005), a qualitative methodology is not rigidly set out from the start. It allows the researcher's flexibility so that there is accommodation for any new information that may emerge during the process of research.

Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) concur as they believe that qualitative researchers propose designs that are more open and changeable. This type of research is an "iterative process that requires a flexible, non-sequential approach" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 31). For example, interview questions may change because the aim is to learn about the problem that is being investigated or studied from participants and to address the research to obtain information. The researcher in this study is also flexible so as to leave room for any new information that may arise.

Theoretical lens- Researchers often use some sort of theoretical lens to view their study. This means that they use a theory of knowledge that they base their research on (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

This theory of knowledge is about how we know things, that is, ways of knowing about the world. This study also uses social constructionism theoretical framework which highlights the social, historical and collective nature of human consciousness (Durrheim, 1997).

Social constructionists believe that through daily interactions between people, we construct knowledge and understanding of the world. This social interaction and more importantly language are of great interest to social constructionists (Burr, 1995). Corey (2001) as cited in Stanton (2005) states that the social constructionism is of the view that reality is based on the use of language. Also, reality and language are a function of situations in which people live. This study also takes note of the stories told by respondents as a way of constructing reality. That is, the language used in interviews is casual in order for participants to feel free in expressing their views clearly.

This theoretical framework allows the researcher to be part of the research process as the researcher in this study is also part of this research process in terms of having face-to-face interview with participants. This fits into this research study as indicated in the previous chapter that social constructionism is used as a theoretical lens for this study.

Interpretive Inquiry- This is the form of inquiry “in which the researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand” (Creswell, 2007, p. 39). These interpretations are as a result of the researchers’ background, experiences and history. This means that researchers aligning to this approach are interested in how reality is heaped by people’s subjective experiences about the world. Hesse-Biber (2017, p. 6) puts it clear that the interpretive position “assumes the social world is constantly being constructed through group interactions thus, social reality can be understood via perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities”. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) are in agreement with this view, in that they believe that the interpretive approach aims to explain the subjective meanings behind social action.

In this study, as previously mentioned, the researcher’s experience as a registered counsellor as well as the participants’ experiences are taken into consideration when co-constructing reality. The researcher acknowledges that the way she conducts the interview and interprets the findings may be coloured by her own experiences.

The interpretive inquiry and social constructionism seem to enhance each other as both allow the researcher to be part of the whole research process as well as being involved in the information being generated as discussed in previous chapters in terms of how the researcher and participants interact with each other (Stanton, 2005).

Interpretive inquiry employs techniques such as interviewing and participants' observation (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This fits in with this study as interviews are used as a data collecting technique. These methods according to Stanton (2005, p. 72) seem to be "consistent with social constructionist's beliefs in terms of the process through which interacting persons (researcher and participants) engage in co-construction of realities between them". After the final report, researchers, participants and readers make an interpretation of the report as a result of multiple views of the problem that can emerge from these interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

Holistic account - Denzi & Lincoln (2000) as cited in Stanton (2005) are of the view that qualitative researchers look at the larger picture, the whole picture and begin with a search of understanding the whole. These qualitative researchers view research as a process rather than an event (Hesse-Biber, 2017). That is, they try to develop a complex picture of the issue under study. This fits well with the social constructionists' theoretical view that considers all people and phenomena within their context. This will be applied to this study by taking each participant's unique contextual account into consideration. Each participant's larger context in terms of family, society and work in relation to their experience on becoming registered counsellors may be crucial in giving meaning to their reasons for choosing to become registered counsellors.

Furthermore qualitative researchers are not bound by cause-and-effect relationships among factors but rather they understand the whole phenomenon under study as a "complex system that is more than the sum of its parts" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 43).

The cause-and-effect relationship which is a product of linear causality under the umbrella of Newtonian epistemology will limit understanding of the problem under study (Fourie, 1998).

For example, the researcher in this study is not bound by cause-and –effect reasoning that might be that people become registered counsellors because they have had a bad experience in the past. That general assumption will limit reasoning into other reasons why people choose to become registered counsellors. It is for this reason that the researcher in this study looks at the bigger and whole picture to get an understanding of the whole issue under study.

Inductive data analysis - Qualitative researchers work back and forth between themes until they establish comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2007). That is, the researcher immerses in the details and specifics of the data so as to discover categories and interrelationships (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Researchers usually involve participants so that they have a chance to shape the themes that emerge from the process. The researcher in this study is consistently flexible when working with data. This is because the focus is more on the process than a set of fixed producers. As a result, flexibility is key. The researcher gets to be aware of new information that might become available anytime into the research process. Every theme that emerges is noted and the researcher gets to identify all themes and comes up with more comprehensive themes. Participants are equally involved in terms of identifying these themes. Qualitative research is typically inductive in nature (Hesse-Biber, 2017). This means that the researcher first begins with accumulation of specific data and the analysis which leads to a more general understanding of the topic.

This is the reason why the questions are generally open-ended allowing more themes to emerge. Similar with this study, the interview questions are open-ended to allow participants to express themselves for a better understanding of the subject under investigation.

4.4 Population

The population comprises of people who are registered counsellors with the HPCSA. The information about these registered counsellors was obtained from the iRegister on the HPCSA website. Since the iRegister does not contain information such as telephone numbers, addresses and websites; the researcher used google and a telephone directory to get such information.

4.5 Sampling

There are different ways to choose a sample and this depends on the area of study and the research methodology used. Since the researcher in this study is working from a qualitative framework, she is less concerned with statistical accuracy and generalising findings than with detailed and in-depth analysis (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). One of the characteristics of a research design is interpretive inquiry- which typically does not draw large or random samples. For this reason purposeful sampling is used because it deals more with description rather than generalisation (Dawson, 2002).

Since the researcher herself is a registered counsellor and knows other registered counsellors in Pretoria, a convenience sample was selected.

It might happen that one participant (registered counsellor) is not available for the study and if this happens, a snowball sample will be used because it “helps to gain access to participants when the framing of the target population is not possible” (Bless, Smith & Sithole, 1988, p. 176). Working within the qualitative framework, the researcher is less concerned with generalising the findings to a large population. The goal is to get in-depth opinions and stories from participants as Lapan et al, (2012) concur that purposeful sampling seeks information rich sources than producing representative samples. In this research three information rich cases were selected, that is, three registered counsellors.

The following criteria was used for sampling purposes:

- Participants needed to be registered counsellors with the HPCSA with an active status on the iRegister;
- Participants had to be fluent in English as this is the language used during the research;
- Gender is not a determining factor;
- Participants' current work (whether in the field or not) does not form part of the deciding factor;
- Participants needed to have at least experience or should have had worked as registered counsellors.

4.6 Data Collection

Neuman (1997) as cited in Stanton (2005, p. 74) is of the view that “qualitative research is interested in documenting people’s personal accounts”. This approach is suitable for

this study which uses in-depth interviews as a method of inquiry, whereby participants' personal accounts will be documented.

Qualitative interviews are regarded "as special kind of knowledge- producing conversation" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 116). The purpose of in-depth interviews according to Seidman (1998) is to understand the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Hesse-Biber (2017) concurs that in-depth interviews use individual participant as a point of departure because the individual is assumed to have unique knowledge about the world. The individual is also able to share the knowledge and experiences through verbal communication. This fits well with the social constructionist's view that the researcher is concerned with lived experiences of the participation as well as the meaning-making which is a partnership between the researcher and the participant. According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999), this method allows for a deeper level of understanding. At the same time, it remains sensitive for linguistic patterns that come out during the interview. This quality is important to social constructionist's viewpoint and therefore makes it suitable to this study.

Interviewing also fits well with the interpretive inquiry of research because it is a natural form of interacting intimately with people so that we understand how they feel and think (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). This interview was conducted along the lines of a conversation between each participant and the researcher. Hesse-Biber (2017, p. 106) is of the opinion that researchers using in-depth interviews are "looking for patterns that emerge from thick descriptions of social life recounted by the participants". This fits well with researchers using social constructionist theory of knowledge because it takes into account the social context which the participant lives in. During the interview the

researcher remains aware that reality is co-constructed between herself and the participants, which is one important principle of social constructionism.

This means that meaning-making is a partnership between the researcher and the participants. During the interview the participants are given authority over their own stories as they are regarded as experts on the topic. The researcher has nevertheless asked questions that are based on own beliefs and experiences that she gained as a registered counsellor. Since building rapport is important during the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2017), the researcher took the role of an active listener, maintained eye contact and made appropriate gesturing to achieve this.

According to Drummond (1996), interviews vary in terms of the type of questions asked and the dominance of the interviewer or interviewee. They are categorised into structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews. These are discussed in order to indicate which one can be used for this study and the relevance thereof.

Structured interviews - during structured interview the researcher is in control. The questions are prepared in advance and the same wording and order is used with each participant. The researcher usually does not elaborate on the questions asked (Drummond, 1996). These type of interviews want concrete answers to a finite number of focused questions. The results from this type of interviews are easy to analyse. However, the negative part about this is that the researcher cannot ask further questions and clarify. This could result in some important information being overlooked.

Unstructured interviews- These type of interviews are also known as open-ended interviews. In this case, the interviewee is in control and is always encouraged to

elaborate and expand on whatever he or she will be saying as indicated above that the participants are regarded as experts on the topic.

These interviews allow the participants to express their words and opinions freely. This study uses these type of interviews as they are believed to help in getting a holistic understanding of the participant's point of view. According to Dawson (2002), unstructured interviews are sometimes called life history interviews. They help the participants to be free to talk about what they feel is important "with little directional influence from the researcher" (Dawson, 2002, p. 28).

The problem with unstructured interviews is that the researcher must be able to establish rapport with the participants. This is because the participants are going to reveal intimate life information (Dawson, 2002). As indicated previously, the researcher in this study establishes rapport with the participants so that they feel comfortable, safe and valued. According to Graham (as cited in Stanton, 2005), the researcher must be able to observe behavior and must have the skills necessary for face-to-face interview. This is true as Maxwell (2013) stresses that for interviewing to be useful, the researcher needs to ask questions about specific events and actions, rather than asking questions that elicit generalisations.

Semi-structured interviews- These are a mixture of the two types of interviews as outlined above. The researcher usually has specific questions to ask but can now and again off ramp as points of interest arise.

4.7 Validity and Reliability

The researcher also takes into account the issue of validity and reliability. Validity refers to the degree to which the study actually measures what it is supposed to measure.

It means telling your audience how you know that your findings are convincing and will be received as credible (Hesse-Biber, 2017).

“Credible research produces findings that are convincing and believable” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 62). According to qualitative researchers, credibility of research is established while research is being undertaken. This is because validity is a process and not a specific end goal that the researcher can easily achieve (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Qualitative researchers have the knowledge that sometimes there will be outside threats that will have an influence on their study. Quantitative researchers view these outside threats as nuisance variables and believe that they can be controlled and eliminated. Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers believe that it is not possible to get rid of such threats and they embrace them as part of the study, trying to find out what impact they have on the outcomes of the study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). It is this type of ‘outside variables’ that make up the contextual factors fundamental to social constructionism viewpoint.

One way of ensuring credibility in research is triangulation. Triangulation means employing different methods to study the same research question (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Lapan et al, 2012). It basically means examining how different sources of data on the same topic may complement each other for a deep understanding of the topic. In this study triangulation is used in terms of theoretical triangulation where different perspectives such as social constructionism and interpretive

approaches are used. Data triangulation is also used in terms of taking into account different data sources such as interviews as well as data from the literature review.

Another way to ensure validity is through respondent validation. Respondent validation is when the researcher solicits feedback about data from the respondents (Maxwell, 2013). Respondent validation also helps in reducing misinterpretations in terms of the meaning of what participants say.

Social constructionists take into consideration that all research is coloured by the researcher's perspective and they reject the notion that the research findings can be accurate reflections of reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Burr, 2012). The aim of qualitative research thereof is not to come to a better understanding of reality but rather to better understand people's personal experiences (Stanton, 2005) as is the aim of this research study.

Reliability according to Stanton (2005) refers to the degree in which the researcher's observation of the gathered information can be trusted. It refers to "the extent to which the instrument yields the same results on repeated trials" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 88). Reliability is more concerned with the consistency in measures. Since this study is conducted from the social constructionism framework, consistency in measurement is not of importance because social constructionists are of the view that the essence of the study is embedded in mutual interactions between contexts and phenomenon (Stanton, 2005). This is in contrast with the idea of researchers working from a quantitative perspective where the focus of the quality and nature of the measuring instrument is to produce the same results when the study is repeated. Qualitative

researchers that are working from the interpretive and social constructionist framework are more concerned with the social interaction and the phenomena being studied, as a result they “do not assume that they are investigating a stable and unchanging reality and as a results they do not expect to find the same results repeatedly” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 64). These researchers expect individuals to behave differently and express different opinions when the context changes. Instead of using reliability, they propose dependability.

Dependability refers to “the degree to which the reader can be convinced that the findings did indeed occur as the researcher says they did” and it is achieved “ through rich and detailed descriptions that show how certain actions and opinions are rooted in and developed out of contextual interaction” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 64).

It is therefore important for the researcher to note that when context changes, it also calls for a change in interpretation. The researcher in this study is aiming to achieve this by going back and forth to the interview text for reference when each participant’s context changes.

The following guidelines for ensuring reliability by Stiles (as cited in Stanton, 2005) were deployed during the study:

- *Disclosure of orientation* whereby the researcher has already disclosed the framework of knowledge which the study is working from. In this study the researcher is working from the social constructionist theory of knowledge as indicated in previous chapters;

- *The social and cultural setting* of participants is taken into consideration so as to accommodate them into the interpretation of each story. This study takes into consideration the social and cultural context of each participant and make use of it when making interpretations;
- *Internal processes of investigation* is the impact the research process has on the researcher. This is important because during the qualitative research, the researcher is said to become a tool of the process. (Creswell, 2007; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999);
- *Engaging with information* where the researcher in this study informs the participants that she is engaging in conversations with them in a form of interviews with regards to their life stories in order to get a better understanding of why they became registered counsellors, so as to co-create reality.

4.8 Data Analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to “describe, evaluate and explain the content and characteristics of the data that have been collected in the research project” (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 317). To make sure that the analysis is credible and transparent to others, (Matthews & Ross, 2010) propose that the analysis should meet the following criteria:

- *Systematic and comprehensive* where a set of procedures should be followed and the same procedures applied to all the cases;
- *Grounded* in terms of the data taken in a raw state because it was said or written;

- *Dynamic* in the sense that ideas and themes emerge during the process and as such the process must be flexible and allows for changes;
- *Accessible* in terms of how the researchers' interpretations are used to develop analysis. These must be open and understandable.

According to Terre Blanche & Durrheim, (1999, p. 139), when analysing data, researchers using the interpretive approach “stay close to the data to interpret it from a position of empathic understanding”. This study uses thematic analysis which helps the researcher to work with raw data in identifying and interpreting key ideas and themes.

Thematic analysis is defined as “a method of analysing for coding or scoring verbal materials to make inferences about characteristics and experiences of persons, social groups, or historical periods” Smith (as cited in Lapan et al, 2012, p. 129). One of the benefits of thematic analysis is the issue of flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This is appropriate since the study is using qualitative methods and qualitative data is mainly about “interpreting and getting a good understanding of the words, stories, accounts and explanations of our research respondents” (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 373).

The social constructionism theory of knowledge which this study is ascribing to also stresses the importance flexibility and the use of language in constructing reality. Therefore, thematic analysis fits perfectly as a method of analysing data to be used in this study. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) provide the following guidelines for analysing data which the researcher uses to structure her analysis:

- *Familiarisation and immersion*- during this phase the researcher develops ideas about what is studied before and during the interviews. It is important for the researcher to immerse herself in the data so that she becomes familiar with the content. Immersion usually involves “repeated reading of the data and reading the data in an active way searching for meanings, patterns and so on” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 16).

Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) concur that in this phase the researcher has to reread the text many times so that she knows the data well to be able to know what interpretations are likely to be supported by the data and what not.

During this phase it is a good idea to take notes or draw diagrams for coding that will follow in subsequent phases. (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

- *Inducing themes* – during this phase the researcher looks at emerging themes in the text. The aim is to look at the information in such a way that you work out “what organising principles are which ‘naturally’ underlie the material” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 141). The main aim during this phase is to look for themes in the text. This is where the researcher starts to think about the relationships between the different levels of themes. That is, main themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is advisable to find enough themes for the integration of all the themes to be meaningful. By the end of this phase the researcher will start to make sense of significant themes and it is advisable not to abandon or discard anything until the next phase.

- *Coding* - during this phase the researcher marks “different sections of the data as being instances of, or relevant to one or more of your themes” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 143). Data is marked into different sections that may refer to the same theme.

Charmaz (as cited in Lapan, et al, 2012, p. 44) defines coding as:

“naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorises, summarises and accounts for each piece of data”.

This process usually merges with the previous phase during which themes were developed.

- *Elaboration* is where the researcher explores themes more closely to check “if sub-themes emerge” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Step 2 and Step 3 that is, inducing themes and coding have helped in making sure that the information is reviewed so that the remarks that were far away from each other are brought closer together. This helps to “capture the finer nuances of meanings not captured” by the original coding system (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 144). At the end of this phase the researcher should have an idea of what the different themes are, how they fit together and what is the overall story they tell about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- *Interpretation and checking* is the last step where the researcher presents her interpretation about the results of the study.

The researcher goes through the interpretation to check any contradictions and fix weak points (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The interpretation should be done in a written report by aligning it around the themes that emerged.

This written report should “tell the complicated story of the data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 23). This is an opportunity for the researcher to indicate her own role in collecting data and making the interpretation.

- As mentioned previously, qualitative researchers believe that the outcome of the research may be coloured by their own personal involvement in the phenomenon, as well as how they collected and analysed data.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

As a researcher one must always bear in mind that the research process intrudes on people’s lives. According to Dawson (2002), some people might find participating in a research as a rewarding process and others might not.

The following ethical considerations were taken into account when conducting this research:

4.9.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is basically an issue of human rights (Hesse- Biber, 2017). The participants have the right to know about the nature, the purpose and the consequences of the study.

The main purpose of informed consent is to make sure that the people who are going to take part in the research understand what they are consenting to participate in. According to Matthews & Ross (2010), consent should be freely given, meaning that people must not be coerced into participating in a research. Participants must be informed that participation is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw at any time.

For this study the researcher provided the participants with a consent form which explains in full and clearly stipulates the purpose and aim of the research. (The consent form is available on request.)

4.9.2 Deception

Participants must not be deceived about the nature and aim of the study. Deliberate misrepresentation of facts is an ethical dilemma.

4.9.3 Privacy and Confidentiality

Participants need to be assured that they will not be identified and that their responses to the study will be confidential. They also need to be informed on how the results will be disseminated so that they can make informed decisions about participating in the study. A consent form which contains issues about anonymity and what the study is about was made available for participants to sign. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) add that caution should be taken when interviewing people about intense personal experiences since respondents may feel exposed or vulnerable.

The researcher has made sure that each participant feel at ease. She also informed them that should they feel unease at any time during the interview, they have the right to stop the researcher.

Furthermore, they were told that they have a right to answer particular questions or not to answer them. Terre Blanche & Durrheim (1999) suggest that the researcher should make it his or her responsibility to make sure that respondents are at ease with the degree of the interview.

According to Stanton (2005), the researcher should take note that the manner in which he or she writes the person's story together with the themes that he or she elicits should be ethical. The researcher must take caution not to include or exclude any information on the basis of his or her bias. This needs to be taken into consideration during the study.

4.9.4 Research participants' rights

According to Barlow & Durand (1995, p. 693-694), people who participate in research have the following rights which were taken into consideration throughout this study:

- To be informed about the purpose of the study;
- The right to privacy;
- The right to be treated with respect and dignity;
- The right to be protected from physical and mental harm;
- The right to choose to participate or refuse to participate without prejudice and reprisals;
- The right to anonymity in the reporting of the results;
- The right to the safeguarding of their records.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter gave an overview of the methodology used for this research project. Qualitative research approach was highlighted as the most suitable method for this research project.

The guidelines for a research design were discussed bearing in mind how they relate to the social constructionist theory of knowledge which this research ascribes to. Issues of validity and reliability were highlighted. It was also indicated how the researcher planned that the study produces results that are valid and reliable.

The data collection method selected for this study, which is in-depth interviews, was discussed to indicate the method's relevance to social constructionist theory of knowledge and the interpretive approach.

Three people who are registered counsellors in terms of the rules of HPCSA are interviewed and these interviews take the shape of a conversation between the researcher and each participant.

Data will be analysed using thematic analysis. Data analysis phases were discussed as a guide to the way in which the researcher in this study will analyse data. The researcher acknowledges the fact that the way she analyses data and interprets the results may be coloured by her own experiences. The chapter outlined ethical considerations that will take center stage in this research project. It was indicated that a consent form which explains in full the purpose and aim of the research will be given to the each participant. Participants' rights will be respected at all times.

CHAPTER 5: KAIT'S STORY

WHEN ANGER CHANGES INTO MOTIVATION

Participant: Kait

Age: 27

Gender: Female

Educational level: Honours in Psychology

Years registered with HPCSA: 3

Occupation: Registered counsellor employed fulltime in Employee Assistance Programme

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the interview conversation between the researcher and the participant is analysed. A discussion of what emerged from the interview conversation is highlighted in terms of themes. It is imperative to note that these themes are not exhaustive and do not represent the ultimate truth about the participant nor do they encompass the experiences of registered counsellors in general. The researcher acknowledges that the themes highlighted may be coloured by the lens through which she looked at that particular time. This means that another person may identify different themes according to his or her own

lens. The themes were constructed according to the aims of the research; which is to know the reasons why people chose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance and future is in the South African context.

5.2 The research setting

The first time I met Kait she seemed to be a quiet person who did not converse much. There were many people in the room and she would just greet people and then minded her own business. I overheard her telling someone that she is a registered counsellor and I immediately became interested. I then approached her and explained that I needed her to be one of my participants for my research. She asked what the research was about and I explained the aims of the research and that I will be conducting an interview with her at an agreed date because I first had to give her the consent form. She was interested and we agreed on the date and the venue was agreed upon which was to be her place of work.

Unfortunately a week before the interview date she got admitted to hospital and we had to reschedule. A week later she gave me a call to say she is recovering from home and we agreed that the interview will take place at her home but later she arranged that we do a telephonic interview because she was really not feeling well. The researcher understood Kait's condition and agreed to do a telephonic interview. The researcher explained to her that during the interview they will still use a recorder. Two days before the interview, the researcher emailed Kait the consent form so that she could fill it in and email it back.

5.3 The story of Kait

Kait is a young woman who works as a registered counsellor in Employee Assistance Programme. Kait was the first person to be interviewed and initially the interview was meant to be at her house but unfortunately she fell ill and we had to do a telephonic interview. Kait's highest qualification is an Honours degree in Psychology and at present she is doing a Master's degree in Public Health. She has been registered with the Health Professional Council of South Africa as a registered counsellor since 2015.

Kait had a sad life experience where she lost her sight while doing matric. The situation was hard for her because she is a driven person and had already made plans on what goals she wanted to achieve in life. The situation was depressing for her because the people close to her did not support or encourage her to pursue her goals. This situation made her very angry but luckily she channeled that anger into a motivation for her to reach her dreams and prove people that she can make it in life.

Despite the challenging situation she was faced with, she pushed hard and passed her matric and managed to further her studies. Kait believes that people do not attain their goals because they listen to what people think about them. She believes that if one has self-motivation and determination, everything is possible. She encourages people to ignore what other people think of them and rather for each and every person to listen to the inner voice that always gives you an indication of what to do when faced with challenging situations. Kait is passionate about the category of registered counsellors and believes that they are relevant in South Africa because they offer basic psychological services. She believes that registered counsellors are the ones to be consulted first in dealing with mental health challenges.

She stresses the importance of registered counsellors working with other healthcare professionals in terms of mental wellbeing of the communities. She is worried about the category in terms of challenges that registered counsellors face. She has experienced these challenges in her previous employment where she was paid according to lay counsellors' salary. She is also concerned about the fact that registered counsellors are often confused with psychologists. She sometimes believes that there is light at the end of the tunnel because some government departments have started advertising vacancies for registered counsellors.

This for her is an indication that registered counsellors are gradually and slowly being recognised. She is happy in her current employment because the employer recognises and understands the category of registered counsellors. She feels that it is in this current employment where for the first time she is using her profession to the fullest in terms of doing her job according to the scope of practice as dictated by the Health Professional Council of South Africa.

Kait is concerned about the role the Health Professional Council of South Africa is playing in terms of promoting and supporting the category of registered counsellors. She believes that the HPCSA is not visible enough in making the public aware about the role and scope of practice for registered counsellors. According to her, the HPCSA needs to be active because it is the statutory body that governs and dictates the terms and conditions for registered counsellors. She believes that the misconceptions about the category being discontinued might be true taking into the consideration the lack of public awareness from HPCSA' side.

5.4 Emerging themes

5.4.1 *The need to help others*

Kait's need to help others was motivated by a personal life experience that she endured. This experience left her feeling despondent because the people in her life had totally lost faith in her. She felt depressed and traumatised and as a result she had to push herself to prove to people that she can still make it in life.

"I would like to share a personal experience that actually pushed me and motivated me, because, um...the people around me had lost faith, you know, me becoming somebody, somewhere.

So while I was in matric...I became partially blind. And after a month without regaining my sight back, you know, I was told by doctors that you know...you would need to stop with your studies, until maybe your sight becomes much better in terms of you continuing with school.

At that present moment, you know, what people perceives my situation to be was quite depressing and traumatic at that stage".

The way people perceived Kait's situation made her to become very angry. She used this negative perception positively by changing the anger into motivation to push on and show people that she can turn her situation around in terms of achieving the goals she has set out for herself.

"As someone who was quite driven and so forth, it actually broke me down. And...Ah...it broke me to a point whereby I got angry. I got angry to a point whereby I wanted to prove people that this is not how I intended my life to be.

And I, with that particular anger I changed into a motivation of actually wanting to prove people wrong, and also just achieving the goals that I wanted to”.

This motivation helped Kait realise the importance of self-awareness in terms of knowing your goals and how to achieve them. Kait became aware of the need to ignore people's perceptions of her situation.

“And you know, um...having some sort of self-awareness and understanding your goal in life is not perceived by what people around you are saying. It's more about what you see yourself going through and how you're going to get through it”.

At the end Kait managed to regain her life. This gave her a feeling of triumph in that she did prove her critics wrong by finally achieving her goals. She is thankful that she ignored what other people thought of her situation.

“Three months down the line I was able to gain my sight back. I did write my prelims and I wrote my finals. And I got an exemption in terms of you know, studying further. If I had listened to those particular people I would still maybe be stuck in life and so forth”.

In her quest to help others, Kait has realised that people often lose themselves in life because of what other people think about their situations.

To help such people, she encourages people to listen to their inner voices in order to have control over their situations. She believes that people have the power to change whatever situation they find themselves in.

“When you speak to different people you understand the situation that they’re going through, and you find that people actually lose themselves because of what people are telling them. It becomes...quite challenging because it means that people are actually stealing your dreams, they’re stealing your future and you’re letting them get deeper and deeper into your situation and you lose focus and control.

And that’s what you find when certain people who have work related conflicts, who are in relationships and feel that , you know, I’ve given myself to my... you’re letting go of yourself because of the situation that you’re going through. But you’re not listening to your inner self telling you about yourself and what you need to do in order for you to get through a specific challenge.

So that is one of the dearest stories that I always have.....to understand that I have the power to have control over my situation”.

Kait believes that in engaging with people, one gets to know and understand the person better. This engagement makes it possible for Kait to help people who experience challenges in life by offering different interventions to their problems.

“I’ve got interest in terms of being around and engaging with various types of people, just to get a better understanding of, you know, the human mind of a person. I love getting into people’s private space and getting a better knowledge of their perspectives about life, and the type of challenges that they are facing and seeing what difference can one make in terms of you know,

giving someone a different light to what they are perceiving or, you know, tapping into somebody's hidden strength, ah, and making them visible".

Kait's interest in understanding the human mind is proven by her love for Psychology. She is preparing to further her studies in Psychology and feels that knowing about public health will develop her knowledge further in terms of policy implementation.

"I've got an honours degree in Psychologyand I'm currently doing my Masters in Public Health...that's where my actual love for wanting to become a psychologist came from...I just want to finish the policy implementation part of ...ah...public health first before I can enter into doing my masters in Psychology".

Kait's personality traits fit well with the traits of a helper. She believes that helping people for her comes naturally because she is not judgmental when people open up to her about the challenges they face in life.

"I am a very open-minded person, bubbly, fun to be around.

Sometimes you find yourself interacting with people, and people just genuinely opening up to you naturally without, you know, them feeling fearful or feeling that, you know what, this particular person will judge me".

Kait continues with her love and need to help others in her workplace. She explains her day to day duties where mainly is about psychological wellbeing.

"We provide brief, um, psychological interventions to various people in terms of, you know, looking at trauma, looking at any type of bereavement counselling and relationships aspects.

Also you know doing some small screening in terms of identifying any type of ...psychiatric or health related issues whereby we would be able to appropriately refer clients to specialists and so forth.

Um, as I stated, we do a lot of group trauma interventions. We do a lot of counselling, we do a lot of um...psych education. We also do a lot of training in terms of ...um...one's wellbeing to different organisations".

5.4.2 Feeling of fulfillment

Kait's love for helping others gives her a satisfactory feeling knowing that she has made an impact and a difference in somebody's life. The act of simply speaking to someone in distress makes her happy knowing she had managed to help the person get things under control.

"Sometimes you might feel a client might come to you and feel that, you know, this problem is too big for me. But after speaking to you it becomes, um, you know, they become, they realise that....i have had things under control, it's just that I was, you know, I had a lot of self-doubt".

Kait's feeling of fulfillment is brought about by the thought that clients appreciate that she had helped them.

"It feels good to have a conversation with someone who says, thank you by the end of the day because you have made a difference. As much as that person might not come back and say, you know, this person changed my life".

Kait gets an overwhelming feeling knowing that she had saved someone who might have had the thought of ending their life. She becomes happy knowing that the person is mentally sound and spending time with his or her loved ones.

“When you end that call, you also feel that, you know what, I made a difference in this particular person’s life. I saved somebody from committing suicide, they are safe there with their loved ones. And then that is the best, you know, feeling ever in terms of assisting those around you, or those you meet within your path”.

Kait believes in the importance of doing follow-ups on her clients to find out how they are coping after helping them with psychological interventions.

“There is follow ups that I’m doing in terms of making sure that this person does not take rush decisions in terms of , you know what life challenges is putting is actually putting towards them”.

5.4.3 Working in a multidisciplinary team

Kait believes that registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa in that they are part of a broader network of health care professionals. She is of the view that healthcare professionals have to work together to help the community with mental health issues.

“We work in a multi-disciplinary team whereby we have a lot of people that we are working with. So, for 80% of the time we find ourselves working with other professionals in terms of assisting people with psychological services.

...health related issues whereby we would be able to appropriately refer clients to specialists and so forth”.

Kait emphasises the point of multidisciplinary team by indicating what each category offers in terms of dealing with clients. She makes this point to show how registered counsellors fit in the whole picture and that a client needs to be treated holistically to function well.

“...when you look at social workers ...its more about, you know, holistically looking at a home environment, and making it quite conducive forchildren. And then you look at a psychologist whereby it's more long term therapy, more of diagnosis and so forth.

And you look at psychiatrist, it's a mixture medication, ah...the medical field as well as, um...psychology.

So in terms of what I have stated, we are the main point in assisting or, you know, providing guidance or being the people that have access to getting a better understanding of a person...Our scope is quite diverse whereby it can just merge into these specific ones”.

The importance of working with other health care professionals is evident in Kait's work environment. People get referred to the Employee Assistant Programme by different healthcare professionals in order to get help in terms of their psychological problems. Kait and her colleagues also refer clients to other healthcare professionals.

“When you're taking, ah...when you look at a person that's HIV positive, it's either they get referred to you by a general practitioner.

We have managers that refer their employees to the employee wellness program because they are not fully functioning at home. They're not fully functioning at home and it is already affecting their work performance.

...whereby we would be able to appropriately refer clients to specialists and so forth. So, for 80% of the time we find ourselves working with other professionals in terms of assisting people with psychological services”.

5.4.4 Registered Counsellors as first point of entry

Kait believes that registered counsellors are responsible to provide mental healthcare to communities at an entry phase. She emphasises the relevance of registered counsellors in terms of being the first to be consulted when people need psychological interventions.

“It is quite an important field in society, there is so much we have to offer in terms of us, you know, being the first aids for people. There was actually an article on the HPCSA website where they said that we are the paramedics of the psychology field.

They are extremely relevant because they are, as I said, they are able to assist with certain situations, and being the first hand whereby we make contact with people and establish rapport.

We are the first people that have access in terms of, you know, providing basic counselling interventions to fellow South Africans.

So meaning that we are the first point that is important in terms of people utilizing psychological services.....So we are in terms of an introductory phase.

So, in terms of what I have stated , we are the main point in terms of assisting... we are the people that have access to getting a better understanding of a person before you can even appropriately refer into various different divisions”.

Kait's knowledge about registered counsellor shows that she finds their category very important in society. She bases her knowledge on the Scope of Practice for registered counsellors as dictated by the Health Professional Council of South Africa.

“Our, you know, scope of practice is more short term based whereby you can look at interventions such as solution focus brief therapy whereby we do a lot of counselling services that are brief ... Our scope is quite diverse but according to an introductory phase”.

Kait believes that providing counselling services at an introductory phase is beneficial to society at large because one will understand the challenges that people are facing. This will in turn help to provide possible interventions to make people function optimally.

“Getting a better understanding of the type of situations that, you know, affect South African citizens....assist clients to get to their fullest, ah, potential, get back into their daily functioning in the quickest time possible”.

Kait believes that providing psychological services at an entry level is important in cases where clients do not require prolonged therapy but just need someone to help them get back to their normal state of mind.

“Sometimes when a person comes to you, they’re in need of assistance right there and there. So they don’t necessarily need to be sent through to a psychologists in terms of making diagnosis or having prolonged therapy.

Sometimes people just need something that’s quite brief, and quite shorter in terms of the space of time in order for them to get back into their lives and feel that they are in control. They are able to function properly, and they are able to cope with their daily functioning. So, it’s more of providing guidance or even, you know, helping that client to actually realise their strengths and abilities. And tapping into those in terms of continuing with the journey of life, ah, despite the current challenges that they’re facing. And within one session or two you could have assisted somebody to get a better understanding of their situation”.

5.4.5 Experiencing barriers

Kait is aware that registered counsellors face many challenges in their quest to deliver mental health interventions for society. She believes that despite all the challenges, registered counsellors are still relevant and have a future in South African in terms of ensuring the mental wellbeing of the public.

Kait identified the following barriers as experienced by registered counsellors:

5.4.5.1 Lack of recognition

Kait is of the view that the society at large is not aware that there is a category of registered counsellors created by Health Professional Council of South Africa. She believes that there is still a struggle in ensuring that people understand what registered counsellors are and what their role is in the broader mental health context.

"In terms of being a registered counsellor, one thing I would like to highlight is that, we are, can I put it as, you know, we are not quite recognized within the field, for the field that we're in. Our role is quite, you know, not completely understood by various people, various organizations.

So there is still a struggle within South African context in terms of being recognised as we should be".

Kait feels that many registered counsellors believe that the annual fees prescribed by Health Professional Council of South Africa in comparison with the level of recognition are just too high.

"We were actually having a conversation with fellow registered counsellors, when you look at the fees that we are paying and really, and the fact that we are not as recognised as we should be".

Kait feels that there is hope in that some government departments are visible in terms of advertising vacancies for registered counsellors, but believes that more need to be done.

"In terms of advertising job specs, yes, for registered counsellors.

... Slowly getting there...Um, I can see in government it's quite, you know, a bit visible than it used, than it is in the private sector. I know the South African Police

Services, I know the Department of Labour. I think, as well as the Department of Education recently, actually had that.

But in terms of Department of Education, it's more of occupational therapists, so there is quite a minimum amount of registered counsellors that would fall under the Department of Education. I am not sure in terms of Correctional Services, but, um, I do believe that there was something out for that some time last year.

You find that during that particular vacancy that's available it's either we are out against social workers and psychologists and so forth

So, yes, at the present moment there's very few departments that are being aware of the role. But it's quite limited when you look at the whole society that has, have that degree, ah...of being a registered counsellor compared to the number of vacancies that are made available at the current moment".

5.4.5.2 Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals

Kait believes that there is a confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals such as lay counselors, social workers and psychologists. She experienced this confusion from her previous employer.

"I joined a company called...in terms of being an HIV and treatment counsellor. And there it was registered counsellors and lay counsellors. The registration was not quite recognised in terms of, you know, we would be remunerated according to lay counsellor. As long as you had a one year degree in, in HIV counselling that

was more than enough, or either had, you know, some sort of a background within the HIV field.

If I can put it that way because I even joined....they also remunerated according to the lay counselling profession.

...whereby as a registered counsellor you go for various hours in terms of hours in terms of practicals where you get quite a number of exposures to different fields of psychology.

It's either a social worker or a psychologist. So getting a better understanding of a registered counsellor is sometimes, er, misinterpreted as a lay counsellor.

But as I stated that, you find yourself, you know, against social workers or psychologists”.

Kait's hope about the relevance and future of registered counsellors stems from the fact that her present employer recognises and understands the role of registered counsellors.

“I'm currently working as an EAP commission within the employee health wellness program, um, for a company called Um, being a registered counsellor is a prerequisite in terms of you joining their organisation...

This, er, this company that I am currently working for, which is ..., it was the first time whereby my degree was recognised. It is only when I got into EAP, um, whereby it became more recognised in terms of carrying weight. This is where I'm actually exercising my full profession to its fullest, my full qualification to its fullest”.

5.4.5.3 The role of HPCSA

Kait believes that some of the barriers experienced by registered counsellors are as a result of the Health Professional Council of South Africa as the statutory body not promoting the role and scope of practice for registered counsellors.

“Well, my understanding at the present moment is vague in terms of the role of the HPCSA, ah, is , in terms ofnotifying the public about, you know, registered counsellors and their scope of practice and understanding what type of role we play within society.

So, I still feel at the present moment we are not as recognised as we should be because the Health Professional Council of South Africa is also not playing a part in terms of making our role visible to society.

Yes, you find that there are Government Gazettes that explain the role and so forth, but it's not as frequent as it should be, you understand”.

Kait is of the opinion that the Health Professional Council of South Africa is creating misconceptions about this category by being inactive in terms of promoting the category of registered counsellors.

“And lately there has been this thing whereby our role is going to be discontinued, hence, you know, it's also questionable because it's not being public, ah, it's not put to the public what type of role we have.

And also for them to actually discontinue this particular service also notifies you about their, their good faith with, with the role that we are playing within the society.

...obviously it tells you about the future to state that if you are discontinuing the profession, then it might not be as successful as it should because if it is growing within the, the various departments or institutions, why would there be a discontinuation or a limitation in terms of, you know, the different or the institutions that are able to provide, um, academic training in terms of one being a registered counsellor”.

5.5 Personal reflections

Reflecting back at the conversation with Kait, the researcher acknowledges the fact that Kait is passionate about helping other people in terms of offering psychological interventions for their mental wellbeing. This passion is evident in the duties that she performs at her workplace. Kait promotes the notion of self-awareness in people because this helps in being focused and having control of one's life. She believes that one must not focus on what other people are saying but rather stay focused to achieve one's goals.

Kait feels very strong about the category of registered counsellor. She believes that registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa because they are the first to be consulted in terms of dealing with psychological challenges; and because they work hand in hand with other healthcare professionals.

She feels registered counsellors are not well recognised in terms of why the category was created and what their scope of practice is. She believes that this lack of recognition makes people to confuse registered counsellors with lay counsellors. One thing that concerns her about the category of registered counsellors is the fact that the category

might be cancelled from HPCSA. She believes that this misconception is created by the HPCSA because of not playing an active role in promoting this category.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the story of Kait was provided. The interview transcript between Kait and myself as the researcher was analysed. Themes were identified according to the aims of the study. The following themes were identified.

- **The need to help others**

Kait had a bad life experience when she lost her sight while doing matric. Unfortunately the people around her did not give her support during this time. These people had a lot of negativity about her situation and this left her frustrated and depressed.

She became very angry and fortunately turned her anger into motivation. She motivated herself and ignored what people said about her situation and instead pushed on to achieve her goals. At the end she regained her sight, passed matric and studied further. This experience taught her the importance of self-awareness where she knew her goals in life and how to achieve them. Her life experience made her to see the need to help others.

She believes that people lose themselves in situations because of what other people tell them. This makes people to lose control and focus and end up facing challenges in life.

In terms of her personality she has traits that resonate with a helper. She believes that people open up to her because she is not judgmental. She likes getting into people's

private spaces to get a better understanding of the challenges people face in life. This helps her to understand the type of interventions she needs to offer. She has interest in understanding the human mind, hence her interest in studying Psychology.

Kait's workplace helps her continue with her need to help others where she does among other things counselling, identification of health related issues and psychological interventions.

- **Feeling of fulfillment**

Kait gets fulfilled after making a difference in other people's lives. She believes in helping people to be in control of their lives by showing them the importance of self- awareness. She feels good when clients come back to thank her for helping them.

Kait becomes happy knowing that she has helped someone who was about to take his or her own life. Knowing that the person is happy and spending time with his or her family gives Kait an overwhelming feeling of fulfillment. Kait believes in making follow up consultations to check if people she has helped are coping with life. This makes Kait happy knowing that the psychological intervention she has provided to a client is working well.

- **Working in a multidisciplinary team**

Kait is of the view that registered counsellors cannot be able to deal with mental health issues on their own. She believes that for the country to be able to tackle mental health

problems, all healthcare professionals must work together. This team work proves the relevance of registered counsellors in South Africa in dealing with psychological wellbeing of communities.

Kait's workplace practices this team work because she gets clients who are referred to her by other healthcare professionals and she also refers clients to other healthcare specialists if the need arises.

- **Registered counsellors as first point of entry**

Kait is of the view that the category of registered counsellors was created as the first point of entry in terms of helping people with mental health. She believes that this proves that there is a future for registered counsellors in South Africa. She is of the view that registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa because they are the first to be consulted in terms of solving mental health challenges. This helps in establishing rapport with clients and knowing what kind of life challenges they are facing.

Kait stresses her point by referring to the scope of practice that dictates that registered Counsellors offer basic counseling interventions at an introductory phase. Kait believes that providing psychological interventions at an introductory level is beneficial for clients who do not require prolonged therapy. This helps clients who need someone to help them get back to their daily functioning by tapping into their strengths.

- **Experiencing barriers**

Kait believes that registered counsellors face challenges in their profession. Three types of barriers were identified under this theme, namely; lack of recognition, confusion

between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals and the role of HPCSA.

Kait is concerned because there is lack of recognition regarding the category of registered counsellors. She believes that registered counsellors are not recognised by the public and companies in terms of their role and scope of practice. This lead to society not utilising registered counsellors' services.

Kait made a point that there is a confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals such as lay counsellors, psychologists and social workers. She had an experience with this because at her previous job she was remunerated as a lay counsellor. She makes a point whereby she explains the difference between lay counsellors and registered counsellors where the latter has to do practicum to be exposed to different Psychology divisions before qualifying for the profession.

She concedes that there is some hope in that some government departments especially Department of Labour and South African Police Services advertise jobs for registered counsellors. However, she believes that this is not enough taking into consideration the number of jobs advertised versus the number of people who are qualified as registered counsellors. This is frustrating for her especially when one thinks about the high annual fees being paid by registered counsellors.

She believes that in some of the advertised jobs registered counsellors find themselves competing with social workers and psychologists. She shares the fact that she is happy in terms of her current employment recognising and understanding the category of registered counsellor because being a registered counsellor is a requirement for her job.

She is also remunerated according to her qualification and feels that it is in her current job whereby she uses her qualifications and profession to the fullest.

Lastly, Kait shares her disappointment in terms of how the Health Professional Council of South Africa is not playing an active role in terms of promoting the category of registered counsellors to the public. She feels that even though some information about this category is available in some Government Gazettes, it is not as frequent as it should be. Kait believes that by being inactive in their role to teach the public about the role and scope of practice for registered counsellors, the HPCSA is creating some misconceptions about this category. One such misconception is that the HPCSA is planning to cancel the category of registered counsellors. She believes that the HPCSA must be visible in terms of creating awareness and advocacy in terms of this category.

CHAPTER 6: MARY'S STORY

TEACHING PAVED MY WAY TO COUNSELLING

Participant: Mary

Age: 31

Gender: Female

Educational level: Honours in Educational Psychology

Years registered with HPCSA: 3

Occupation: Registered counsellor working fulltime at a private school

Interview setting: Mary's house

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research setting is briefly discussed and the conversation between the researcher and the participant is analysed. A discussion of what emerged from the interview conversation is highlighted in themes.

It is important to note that the themes are not exhaustive and do not represent the ultimate truth about the participant nor do they encompass the whole experiences of registered counsellors in general. The researcher acknowledges that the themes highlighted may have been coloured through the lens which she looked at that particular time.

This in essence implies that another person may identify different themes according to his or her own lens. The themes were constructed according to the aims of the study in terms of the reasons why people chose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance and future is in the South African context.

6.2 The research setting

The interview took place in Mary's house. Prior to the interview, the researcher had spoken to Mary over the phone inviting her to take part in the research as well as allowing the researcher to interview her. The purpose and aims of the research were explained. Mary sounded like a bubbly person and was eager to be interviewed the following day. This gave the researcher an impression that she was passionate about the work that she is doing. This was also a hint that she is the kind of person who would strike a conversation at first encounter. The researcher then explained to Mary that she first needs to give her the consent form that she needs to go through and a date was set for the interview.

On the day of the interview, the researcher arrived at Mary's house and was welcomed and greeted by a bubbly, friendly and energetic young lady. Mary had already made preparations and set up a round table with chairs, paper and pens. The set up for the interview was prepared outside the house to avoid distractions because there were people in the house.

The researcher explained to Mary that the interaction is going to be informal to allow her to be free to express herself. The researcher also indicated that the questions are open-ended but wherever necessary there would be follow up questions. Mary handed the researcher a completed and signed consent form.

6.3 Mary's story

Mary is a young woman in her early thirties. She had a happy childhood growing up in a farm and a Christian environment. When growing up she always interacted a lot with friends since she was in a boarding school from primary to high school. She was always

popular and a leader in primary school because it was a small school. The transition to high school was not a pleasant one for her because it was a big school and she did not cope.

The reason for this is because high school was a big school and she was no longer popular. For her this created a lot of pressure. In a way she felt bullied and had to withdraw from social interactions. Nevertheless, she had to create coping mechanisms to get through high school.

She regards herself as an optimist and a good listener. She also regards herself as an introvert who prefers a few close friends and her husband is her best friend. She sometimes feels nervous when she has to attend social gatherings such as weddings because of the thought of not knowing anybody there and not knowing who to socialise with as this makes her feel uneasy. Before she became a registered counsellor, she was a teacher for five years and taught English in Thailand for a year. She then came back to South Africa where she taught at a catholic school for three years.

She felt overworked by teaching and decided to take the registered counsellor route. She always regards herself as a teacher and her love to help others developed during her teaching years. She then studied Honours degree in Educational Psychology and thereafter did her internship so as to write board exams and then become a registered counsellor.

She has been registered with the Health Professional Council of South Africa for three years. She is working as a registered counsellor at a private school. She is also involved at a community outreach where they offer extra lessons and social skills to underprivileged learners.

She feels strongly about the category of registered counsellors and is of the opinion that registered counsellors are important in dealing with mental health challenges. She takes cognisance of the fact that registered counsellors experience many barriers in their profession but despite all that she still feels that they are an important part of a multidisciplinary team when it comes to dealing with mental health issues.

6.4 Emerging themes

6.4.1 The need to help others

Mary had an awful experience in terms of transition from primary school to high school. Her need to help others is a way to make sure that other people who go through difficulties in schools get help and do not suffer in silence. She did not seek help when she was being picked on and was confused in terms of whether or not this was bullying. She had to come with her own ways of coping for her to be happy. In a way, she had to choose between 'fight and flight' in order to cope with high school.

Her coping mechanisms were a way to fight her way to be happy throughout high school. She knew that if she finds happiness within herself, she did not have to conform to a group of people to be happy.

"I was in a small school, so I've always been in a small school with a small group of friends. So it was a small group of us.....I was in a very small primary school, then I was a little bit the leader of the group actually.

And then after Grade 8 I went to a bigger school and I really struggled and I was picked on. I don't know if I would go as far as saying I was bullied, but I was very

uncomfortable because I used to be popular, you know, the leader in a small school. Went to a big school and I didn't manage. And I don't know whether that changed me a little bit, um...in terms of becoming more withdrawn.

Um....and having to find the coping skills, you know, to also be happy, not to define myself, or not to find happiness...um...through other people, but rather to find that happiness in myself”.

The bad experience she endured in high school had a big impact in terms of changing her personality from an extrovert to an introvert. She still carries the fear of being around people she does not know especially a big crowd in big gatherings.

“See my mom thinks I am an extrovert, well, I was when I was a child.....in a very small primary school.....and then it changed.

I am actually an introvert though, I would say. I prefer having my few close friends rather than a big group of friends.

And I actually get really nervous when I have to go like to weddings and things because I'm thinking who am I going to talk to if I don't know anybody.

Um...so I do need to recharge on my own at home. I like being on my own, I don't mind spending time on my own”.

Mary indicated that one of her first love is to help others. Her need to help others may have been influenced by her Christian upbringing. The Christian foundations are evident with the type of workplaces she chooses because as a teacher she once worked at a Christian school.

"I grew up in a Christian environment so with Christian foundations. And then in 2011 to 2013 I was at a working at a Catholic school in Durban".

Mary's early days as a teacher prove that she had long felt the need to help other people. She believes that teaching prepared her for the job she is currently doing. She felt that as a teacher it was sometimes hard to pay full attention in helping a child who had problems because of challenges involved with being a teacher. She feels that teachers are most of the time overworked even though people do not realise it. Mary feels that by being overworked she is sometimes impatient with learners and this makes it difficult to concentrate on giving the learners one-on-one attention. This encouraged her to pursue studying Educational Psychology in order to be able to understand the person in totality especially in terms of behavioral patterns of a learner.

"So I was a teacher first, um, or I am still a teacher. I would still define myself as a teacher as well as a registered counsellor.

So, I taught for what, five years before I carried on studying, so I was a qualified teacher. Um, I do think in my case I was lucky because I, I think my teaching experience helped me a lot to prepare me for the work, ah, field.

And I think the reason why I wanted to continue into Educational Psychology is because as a teacher, um...you are often so, ah...overworked even though people think you are not. And sometimes not being able to understand as a teacher, like you can...A child in my class really frustrate me, and me being human I would also lose my patience.

I sometimes found I didn't have the time, enough time, for one on one with the kids, especially if I picked up on the class that there was a problem".

Mary believes that a certain type of personality is crucial in being able to help and offer counselling to others. She believes her personality traits make it possible for her to perform well in her job as a registered counsellor. She shared that being a good listener makes her perform her job effectively. The researcher noted that Mary listens to her carefully and does not interrupt or interject.

"I would describe myself as an optimist, I think I'm a good listener. Um, that's one of the... Well, that is a skill that stands me in a good stead in the job that I'm doing".

Her love for interaction could also be a possible trait in wanting to understand the behavior of a person.

"I mean, lots of time just playing with friends".

Mary's need to help other people made her to study further so that she could understand why people behave in a certain manner. She believes that there is always reasons why people behave the way they do. She is more concerned about the psychological wellbeing of the learners and she is happy that she can concentrate on those psychological aspects at her workplace.

"I did my Honours in Educational Psychology...

I just wanted to gain extra knowledge, what is going on behind this child, like why is this child acting like this? Um, 'cos there was always reasons for kids acting out.

I'm quite happy with the way we're working at the moment....I can focus on the emotional and the social, um, aspects"

6.4.2 Feeling of fulfillment

Mary is happy with the job she is currently doing as a registered counsellor. Being a registered counsellor for her is rewarding. However, she cautions that the job can be tiring since it involves dealing with people's emotions.

"I think it's an immensely rewarding job. It can be emotionally draining"

Mary's advice to people who are planning to be counselors is that they should take care of themselves when it comes to their emotional wellbeing. She believes that for a counselor to be able to help others, they need to be emotionally stable. Counsellors need to have people that they can talk to if they feel emotionally overwhelmed. Mary finds it easy to confide in her husband.

"That's why when, um, students who want to become a psychologist or a registered counsellors ask me, um what is my number one advice, I always say self-care [laughing]. You have to look after yourself because you can't pour from an empty cup. You need to make sure that you're in good space.

Um...I am married, so...I would say my husband is actually my best friend and my confidante".

Mary thinks that being a registered counsellor is rewarding in different ways. She feels satisfied when people acknowledge her job. She shared the following positive aspects about her job:

“So also of positive aspects like I said the rewarding parts, um, getting to work with children on a one-on-one basis.

Having that respect from teachers knowing that you have some extra, inside some extra knowledge, some extra experience which they might not have that I can share with them and give advice. Um, and support them in that way, support the children as well”.

Mary’s need to know the whole person is also visible in terms of attending to others outside her job environment. For Mary, wanting to know the whole child is supported by the fact that she also attends to parents of the learners at her school by offering counselling. This also gives her a feeling of fulfillment.

“...Support parents who come in often very frustrated themselves...”

Mary does not only concentrate on the learners and parents from her school in terms of offering counselling. She also helps others by being involved in community services where she offers her counselling services free of charge to disadvantaged learners. This fulfils her.

“We have a program called, ah, Saturday school where we have...kids....from a poor background.

I’m actually part of the program and...and we do extra lessons with them on Saturday, extra English.....and Maths.

And I also do Life skills with them ... Um, so it’s almost like an outreach project...”

Mary is happy that her workplace supports her in her endeavor for community outreach. The learners she helps in her outreach project get an opportunity to be admitted to the school where she works. She believes this is a good opportunity for them.

“And then in Grade 5 a group of them get chosen to become part of the school...

And they go right through matric and they then have [a foreign subject] as a subject, so that’s another opportunity for them”.

6.4.3 Working in a multidisciplinary team

Mary believes that registered counsellors are relevant and have a future because they work hand in hand with other mental and/or healthcare professionals. Working with other healthcare professionals supports her belief that knowing the whole person enables one to offer appropriate interventions.

“So we work together in therapy centres, so we are a bit of a multiprofessionals.

The social worker and myself are employed by the school. ...I’m lucky that I’m in a school that can afford to have a social worker and a registered counsellor

I think and any job really, you can gain so much from working with others”.

This is cemented by the fact that Mary’s workplace encouraged this team work by having other healthcare professionals who come to the school occasionally to deal with challenges that learners experience.

“We have an occupational therapist and a speech therapist....so they come to the school, but they are not employed by the school”.

Mary believes that as a registered counsellor one cannot be able to solve learners' challenges by herself. She finds that involving other healthcare professionals help in treating the learners holistically. She believes that parents also play an important role in dealing with learners' challenges. This is the reason she regards referrals as playing an important role in team work. Mary shared the following:

"I would say my main referrals are to educational psychologists when I feel there's an academic assessment that is necessary. And then I have my educational psychologist that I know and that I work with, and they would then do the assessment.

Um, they would come to school and I would organise that I would meet the teacher of the child, or the teachers depending, um..., depending on the case, maybe the parents. Um...the educational psychologist and myself and we have like the round table we then discuss how we can support the child".

Mary believes that working with other healthcare professionals at her workplace is beneficial to the learners because they have different people to help them in terms of their social, psychological and educational needs.

"The social worker and myself are employed by the school...

It is fine for them to come to me, thank goodness they have the support of myself and the other social worker as well".

6.4.4 Registered Counsellors as first point of entry

Mary believes that registered counsellors should be the first to be consulted, as this is one of the reasons why the category was created in the first place. She shared these sentiments by referring to why the category of registered counsellors was created in the first place according to the scope of practice.

“So, um, the reason why registered counsellors were introduced in the first place , um, at least according to our scope of practice is, to reach I think a large amount of the population that wasn’t being reached by ,um, psychologists.

The category is to reach people that wouldn’t otherwise have ...access to psychological services”.

Mary acknowledges that registered counsellors have to abide by the rules as set out by the Health Professional Council of South Africa. This is the reason she always keeps this in mind and does her job according to what the scope of practice dictates.

“Um, obviously that we are not allowed to diagnose or anything like that.

Um, still working within our scope of practice, I think we are most..... I must say the majority of cases at the school are things we can work with”.

Mary is well aware that the scope of practice for registered counsellors differs greatly from the scope of practice for Psychologists. She points this fact out to validate her point on the reasons why the category of registered counsellors was created.

“Ah, if I should explain it like this, ah, my friends who are educational psychologists who are working in the schools are providing a service maybe even more, ah, in depth than mine because there’s a few things that are out of my scope of practice. Um, obviously realising that we’re not allowed to diagnose or anything like that”.

The scope of practice is something that Mary uses as a reference to what registered counsellors are supposed to do in terms of dealing with challenges of mental health. She is very clear on what the scope of practice entails. This shows how passionate Mary is about the category of registered counsellors.

“I think.... Even though I wouldn’t mention everything [laughing] that the scope of practice requires us to prevent, promote, intervene and appropriately refer to other professionals, um, which is everything that I’m doing in my job.

And again it is clear from the scope of practice that registered counsellors are the first in line, underline FIRST IN LINE [laughing] for community based psychological support.

And being the first in line we are required to perform basic psychological screening because advanced psychological screening and interventions is done by psychologists, so, ya, we are expected to do basic screening”.

Mary has doubts in terms of whether the main reason for the creation of this category is really happening in reality.

“That’s why I am saying... I actually think registered counsellors are important, but whether they are reaching those people that they should be reaching, I’m not sure.”

6.4.5 Affordable fees

According to Mary the relevance of registered counsellors in South Africa is cemented by the fact that their services are affordable. Since the category of registered counsellors was created to reach disadvantaged communities, it goes without saying that their services have to be affordable and accessible.

“What people have to pay our services may be half of what they would have to pay for an educational psychologists

Our services are cheaper and accessible in that sense.

Um, again because I think we can reach places that psychologists can’t reach. We can be more accessible in that sense. Same as for me because I’m employed by the school the services is free for the kids at the school anyway”.

She also makes a comparison about the fees in terms of a registered counsellor who is in private practice and a psychologist in private practice to prove her point that services offered by registered counsellors are affordable. She noted that some psychologist who work in private practice do offer free services if working closely with schools.

“Like I say, my registered counsellors friends are working....Actually they do have private practice where in that case, maybe it’s easier because it’s cheaper than to go to a psychologist.

I know not all schools work like that...but the Educational Psychologist I work closely with at schools they also offer free services”.

The challenge that brings frustration to her is the fact that during referrals some of her learners cannot afford the fees charged by the healthcare professionals where they would be referred to. She thinks that the best way to help learners who cannot afford to pay for services where they are referred to, is to try and help them in all possible ways.

“But if I have to refer them because I’m realising it is out of my scope of practice, who do I refer to because they cannot afford to go to a psychologist.

Like if you know that it’s a child that cannot afford to be referred to the psychologist we have to try and help the child as much as we can”.

Mary believes that registered counsellors are at an advantaged side in terms of paying for their studies. She brings another angle in terms of affordability in that for registered counsellors it is not compulsory to further your studies by enrolling for a Master’s degree. She points out that one should not regard this as being lazy.

“And also, the other side of the coin...becoming a registered counsellor...because it requires, um, less study which might mean less funds...

Ah, ja, not just in the sense that it requires less study so you can be lazy, but [laughing] it requires less study so that means less funds and you can, um, get in the field of work quicker. Um, I think, I think it is actually more valuable to get more study time...”

6.4.6 Experiencing barriers

Mary believes that registered counsellors are challenged in that they are not well known in terms of the public not being aware that there is a category of registered counsellors that exists.

She has observed that in a situation where people are aware about the category, they still confuse this category with those of other healthcare professionals. She believes that the mother body, that is, the Health Council Professional of South Africa is not playing a major role in promoting the category. She comments that despite the barriers experienced by registered counsellors, the category is beneficial to society.

The following barriers were identified:

6.4.6.1 Lack of recognition

Mary had firsthand experience when it comes to lack of recognition for the category of registered counsellors. This happened at her current workplace when she was first appointed. She had to try and make the school recognise her as a registered counsellor by drawing up the duties she had to perform.

"I think initially when I started working at the school there was a lot of confusion in what exactly am i... because I'm not a psychologist.

First of all, I had to write my own job description at the school because the school did not have job descriptions for a registered counsellor [laughing]. Well, I used the scope of practice for my job description [laughing]".

Mary is passionate about the category of registered counsellors in terms of ensuring that people recognise and understand what registered counsellors are and the role that they

are playing. There is an eagerness from her side to educate all the stakeholders from her workplace to know what her duties are.

“But, um, and then, um, speaking at parents’ evenings, explaining to them what it is I do, what is, um, what my job description is, what my scope of practice is.

But now having been at the school for three years I think we’ve created enough awareness around what I do.”

The lack of recognition might also result from ignorance.

“Because I mean, if I just think, anybody I approach who is not directly related to the field of psychology, has never heard of a registered counsellor”.

6.4.6.2 Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals

Mary feels that there is a lot of confusion in terms of the difference between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals. A lot of confusion is created whereby people are only aware about the existence of psychologists and do not understand what registered counsellors are. This confusion is also evident in her workplace.

“But I’m also not really in the sense of a school counsellor, what the idea of a school counsellor is because we are actually, um, registered with health profession. So, it was difficult getting people to realise where do I fit in.

Ja, I think there is still often confusion especially new people who have not come into contact with me. Um, first of all, just the registered counsellor, like it’s easier

sometimes just to say school counselor because otherwise it just confuses them to say.....what is a registered counsellor”?

This confusion is so negative on the part of registered counsellors that it makes Mary feels disrespected. She feels that people only regard you as important if you are a psychologist.

“Um, and the negative aspect being again the confusion around the job of registered counsellors, sometimes people looking down on you because they think, well, you are not a psychologist, you are only a counsellor”.

According to Mary, people who are part of or are involved in the psychology field are actually the ones who are supposed to know the importance of registered counsellors. On the contrary, these people also think that being a registered counsellor is not enough. They are of the view that one needs to become a psychologist in order to be recognised.

“I’ve had a lady, a psychologist, counselling psychologist approach the school asking, you know, to work closely with us. A very nice lady and I said yes, if we have any referrals we will refer to you.

And she heard I was a registered counsellor and she said to me: Oh, you have to carry on studying, you have to do your Masters, and you have to become a psychologist. And she was very excited, she didn’t say it in a mean way”.

She actually disagrees with the sentiment that one has to become a psychologist to be recognised. She feels strongly about the category of registered counsellors in terms of their scope of practice and development.

“And actually I really thought about it, and I don’t feel the need to do that. I can do everything that I need to do in my category as a registered counsellor.

I think as a registered counsellor you anyway have... going to a lot of workshops, um, getting your CPD points, so even if you didn’t do those extra years of Masters you are ensuring the whole time that you keep learning and keep growing, and you keep...gain valuable experience and , ja”.

6.4.6.3 The role of HPCSA

According to Mary HPCSA is the body that created the category of registered counsellors and she believes that the HPCSA should update and inform the public in terms giving out information. Mary is always on the lookout in terms of any information available from HPCSA promoting the category of registered counsellors.

“Um, you know when you said you wanted to come and interview me, I actually did a little bit of research on what’s out there on registered counselor information. I mean, it’s not the first time, I’ve done it before”.

She feels disappointed that the Health Professional Council of South Africa is not playing an active role in making sure that the public is aware of registered counsellors category.

“Um, I don’t think they are doing enough to make, um, to create awareness about registered counsellors”.

Mary feels that the role of the Health Professional Council of South Africa is not only about promoting awareness of the category of registered counsellors, but also to play a

supportive role in terms of identifying available places where registered counsellors are needed the most in communities.

“Or maybe even to support registered counsellors in trying to find those niches or gaps where they might be needed in the, in South Africa, where, um, they could be of assistance”.

6.5 Personal reflections

Reflecting back at the conversation with Mary, the researcher acknowledges Mary's passion for learners. Mary is a real teacher in the sense that teaching is a process of attending to people's needs and intervening to help them learn and go beyond. This is what Mary does in terms of helping learners at school and again helping those from disadvantaged background during the community outreach project she is involved in.

Mary feels very strong about the category of registered counsellors. Despite the challenges that registered counsellors face, Mary believes that this category is important and she goes all out to make the community aware of the job she is doing in terms of the scope of practice.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the interview setting and Mary's story were outlined. The interview transcript between Mary and the researcher was analysed according to the themes identified. It is important to note that these themes were identified according to the aims of the research. The following are the themes that were identified:

- **The need to help others**

Mary had a negative experience in high school which made her feel the need to help other people who are having similar challenges at school. She had to find coping mechanisms in order to make it through her high school years. She found that self-awareness was important because knowing herself made her realise that happiness does not come from other people but lies within an individual.

This negative experience affected her personality even in adulthood because she was an extrovert at primary school but became withdrawn in high school. This is evident in her behavior as an adult because she does not like interacting with many people. Mary's years of teaching ignited her love to help others. She had always wanted to help and give more time to learners by engaging with them one-on-one. She believes knowing a learner in totality will lead to her understanding of why a learner behaves in a particular way. This will enable her to help and offer appropriate interventions.

Her love for human interaction is also traced back to her childhood. Her personality resonates with her job as she described herself as an optimist who is a good listener. This personality trait enables Mary to perform her job with ease.

- **Feeling of fulfillment**

Mary has a passion for making a difference in other people's lives. She accomplishes this by being involved in a community outreach programme where she offers social skills for disadvantaged learners. She has a feeling of fulfillment after she made a difference in other people's lives. She enjoys working as a registered counsellor because she supports learners, teachers and parents and this gives her a feeling of fulfillment.

She however cautions that being a registered counsellor can be draining. She emphasises the need for self-care in part of the counselor because she believes you cannot help others if you are not emotionally well. She takes care of herself by spending time alone to recharge and talking to her husband. She gives advice about self-care to people who want to become registered counsellors or psychologists.

The same view is shared by Etherington (2001, p. 145) who states that "as a wounded healer, the wounds need to be properly healed because to love others one needs to first be able to love oneself."

- **Working in a multidisciplinary team**

Mary believes in the importance of team work. She notes that the work that registered counsellors are doing is interconnected to the role of other healthcare professionals. This for her is proof enough that registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa. The effort of team work is practiced at her workplace where she works with occupational therapist, speech therapist and a social worker. Having to do referrals is an important part of Mary's job and this is also stipulated in the scope of practice for registered counsellors.

She is of the opinion that working together is beneficial in that they all learn from each other. It is also beneficial to the client because help comes from all directions which results in the client being helped in totality. She sometimes feels frustrated having to refer a learner who cannot afford the fees to where they are being referred to. In this case she and the social worker from her school would try to help the child as much as they could.

- **Registered Counsellors as first point of entry**

Mary emphasises the point that the category of registered counsellors was created to reach people in communities that would not otherwise have access to psychological services. She always refers to the scope of practice that spells it clearly that registered counsellors are the first in line for community based psychological support.

This means that registered counsellors have to concentrate on preventing, promoting, intervening and appropriately referring clients to other healthcare professionals whenever necessary. Mary regards this as an indication enough that the role the registered counsellors play in terms of dealing with mental health problems is important.

She is clear on the difference between the scope of practice for registered counsellors and psychologists. On the other hand, she has doubts whether or not all registered counsellors are really reaching out to those people in the communities that are in need of these services.

- **Affordable fees**

The category of registered counsellors was created for disadvantaged people to access basic psychological services. Mary believes that registered counsellors are relevant because the fees that people pay in terms of their services are affordable and accessible. She makes comparison with the fees that one has to pay to see a psychologist. She notes that the fees for seeing psychologists are quite high. She is thankful that the learners at her school and those from the community outreach she is involved in get free services. She feels frustrated by knowing the fact that if she happens to refer her learners to a psychologist they would not afford the fees. She is of the opinion that registered counsellors who are in private practice are still way more affordable than psychologists.

The issue of affordability is also mentioned when it comes to registered counsellors having to fund their own studies. Mary feels that by being a registered counsellor, one does not have to pursue Master's degree because this will mean that they will have to pay extra money to register or for tuition.

This is in contrast with becoming a psychologist where it is compulsory for one to register for Masters. She cautions that people must not take this affordability issue as an excuse for laziness. She emphasises that people should not stop developing themselves as far as knowledge is concerned. Mary highlights that registered counsellors should keep up with the trends of the industry by attending workshops. This, she believes will get them CPD points and will also help in their professional growth.

- **Experiencing barriers**

Three barriers were identified under this theme, namely; lack of recognition, confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals as well as the role of HPCSA.

Lack of recognition

Mary experienced lack of recognition at her workplace. She shared that when she started at her current workplace she had to write her own job description because at her workplace they did not have a job description for registered counsellors. She took the bull by the horns and referred to the scope of practice in completing her job description.

Her eagerness to want people to recognise this category guided her to find ways to inform and make the public aware of the services offered by registered counsellors. This she achieved by speaking during parents' meetings where she informed parents about the role and scope of practice for registered counsellors. She is happy that after three years of being at the school, people are now aware of what registered counsellors do.

Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals

Mary had firsthand experience in terms of people confusing the category of registered counsellors with other healthcare professionals. She feels that people at her work usually confuse her with a school counsellor and the two are different. The difference is that registered counsellors are guided by the scope of practice and are governed by the Health Professional Council of South Africa.

This confusion makes Mary feel disgruntled because some people at her work look down on her simply because she is not a psychologist.

She feels sad that some people who are in the psychology field feel that being a psychologist is way better than being a registered counsellor. This saddens her because these are the people who should know better.

She experienced this when one psychologist told her that she has to become a psychologist. She disagrees with this mentality because as a registered counsellor she knows that she can do all she needs to do in accordance with the scope of practice. She feels that registered counsellors attend many workshops that contribute to CPD (Continuous Professional Development) points.

The role of HPCSA

Mary is concerned about the public's lack of knowledge in terms of the category of registered counsellors and the scope of practice. She is constantly checking if there is any new information on the web that shed light on the role of registered counsellors.

She is of the opinion that the Health Professional Council of South Africa is not playing an active role in creating awareness about the category to the public like it does with other categories. She believes that the HPCSA has to be the mouthpiece of registered counsellors since they set out the rules and scope of practice for them. Mary went further to indicate that the Health Professional Council of South Africa's role is not only about creating awareness, but also to support registered counsellors in terms of reaching out to those communities that require their services.

CHAPTER 7: SASHA'S STORY

HEALING THROUGH TRAUMA COUNSELLING

Participant: Sasha

Age: 31

Gender: Female

Educational level: Honours in Psychology

Years registered with HPCSA: 5 years

Occupation: Registered counsellor in private practice

Interview setting: Sasha's private practice

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the conversation between the researcher and the participant is analysed. A discussion of what emerged from the interview conversation is highlighted in terms of themes. It is important to note that the themes are not exhaustive and do not represent the ultimate truth about the participant nor do they encompass the experiences of registered counsellors in general.

The researcher acknowledges that the themes presented might be coloured through the lens which she had looked at that particular time. This in essence implies that another person may identify different themes according to his or her own lens.

The themes were constructed according to the aim of the research which is; to know the reasons why people chose to become registered counsellors and what their relevance and future are in the South African context. The analysis is followed by the researcher's personal reflections.

7.2 Research setting

Sasha's name came across when the researcher was searching on the internet (Google) for the names of registered counsellors in the neighboring area. The researcher then made a call to Sasha immediately. The call was answered by the receptionist who advised that Sasha is in counselling sessions the whole day. The receptionist told the researcher that Sasha will return her call in the afternoon when her sessions end.

When Sasha called, the researcher was impressed and introduced herself and explained the purpose of the research. Sasha was speaking so calmly with a gentle voice even after spending the whole day in counselling sessions. She asked the researcher questions which confirmed that she was listening attentively when the research aim and purpose were explained to her. Sasha agreed to be one of the research participants when the researcher asked. The interview date and place were then set. She then asked the researcher to email her the research consent form so that she could go through it and sign before the day of the interview.

Initially, it was agreed that the interview would take place at Sasha's private practice since the natural setting was important in that the participant needed to feel at ease to voice her story. She later explained that she had two young daughters and it will be difficult for her to give the researcher a slot after hours/ work because she had to take care of her daughters in terms of helping with school work and taking care of the family. Moreover, she needed to be busy with counselling sessions the whole day.

She told the researcher that she was passionate about the role of registered counsellors and would sacrifice an hour in between the counselling sessions for a telephone interview. The telephone interview was agreed upon because it is important that the research participants feel free, be respected and treated with dignity so that they can be able to voice their stories. It is also important to remember that the main aim was for the researcher to listen to the stories told by respondents. When people talk to each other, the world gets constructed.

A day before the interview she emailed back the completed and signed consent form. On the day of the interview the researcher explained to her that she would record the conversation and would make notes when necessary.

7.3 The story of Sasha

Sasha is a married mother of two young children. She is a qualified registered counsellor who runs her own private practice. Sasha's highest qualification is an Honours degree in Psychology. She has been registered with the Health Professional Council of South Africa for the past five years. Besides her private practice, she also partners with another healthcare professional at another practice.

She believes in giving back to the community by helping out in a community project run by an NGO where she trains students in terms of social skills and how to maintain a healthy self-esteem. Sasha is a very calm, driven and creative person who likes working with people one-on-one. She is more interested in helping people who experienced traumatic events and thinks that her personality is a strength when coming to dealing with trauma. Her main interest is in children and she always involves parents in the process knowing that if parents know the counselling schedule, it is easy for children to commit to the counselling sessions up till the end.

She decided to specialise in trauma counselling after she observed the trauma the people around her were experiencing. That trauma was as a result of being exposed to violence, crime and some domestic situations. She decided that those people needed someone to help them. This made her to decide channeling her interest in trauma counselling.

7.4 Emerging themes

7.4.1 The need to help others

Sasha's need to help others was ignited by what others around her were going through. People around her were experiencing traumatic events and these experiences made her aware that people were in trouble and needed help. A lot of what was happening around her was traumatic and this made her to decide to specialise in trauma counselling during her studies.

"Um, nothing happened to me personally, but with people around me. I knew some people that were exposed to very violent, um, situations, domestic situations, friends of mine. And then also crime and the after effects of that. So, that made me decide trauma as the specialty field I want to go into."

Sasha's personality traits resonate with that of a helper. She thinks her personality makes it easier for her to help people in terms of dealing with traumatic challenges.

"Because, because of my personality I can deal with trauma. I am a very calm and contained person, so I saw that as a strength. And that is why I went into trauma counselling. I like working with people one on one."

Sasha is more interested in working with and helping children. This is one of the reasons that led her to become a registered counsellor. This love for children makes Sasha to promote her services in the surrounding schools at her area.

"Well, I've always known that I want to work with children, and I want to make a difference. I work only with children, yes...um, 3 to 18 years old...."

... And when we go to schools we introduce ourselves, ah, schools in the area."

Sasha believes that it is sometimes difficult working with children who have experienced trauma because it is not easy for them to open up. She resolves this by applying therapy methods that will help the children relieve the traumatic event. This helps Sasha to come up with appropriate interventions in dealing with trauma.

"And I've decided on children because you can use play mediums. It's not always talking because I also know that trauma makes it difficult to talk. And that's not always the helpful one. So that's where my interest in play therapy started."

Sasha does not only concentrate on traumatic interventions when helping children, she believes in helping them holistically in terms of concentrating on other dimensions that can be beneficial to them.

“So, I do mostly, you know, helping them through self-esteem, bullying, a loss in the family, grief, trauma, anything related to that.

...finding your identity, um, social skills. Ja, that’s what I like to do.”

Sasha regards parents as important stakeholders in terms of the counselling sessions. She involves parents when planning the counselling schedule so that they can commit to the sessions and make follow ups efficiently.

Yes....if parents can, I’d give them a layout of how the session usually work after I’ve done my initial, um, evaluation.

So then I can say to parents, we’re going to need six sessions, can you commit to that? So parents know because I always tell them the value of contact. So, especially for children, they need to know when I’m stopping and when I’m coming. So I see that people follow through because we make an issue of it in the beginning already, getting parents to commit to the process.

7.4.2 Feeling of fulfillment

Sasha had some positive feedback about the job she is doing as a registered counsellor. One thing that makes her happy is the fact that clients see the importance of therapy in terms of commitment by ensuring that they attend all counselling sessions.

“For I’ve had personally, um, positive experiences. For one, um, we see that clients can, you know, they can commit to therapy for the duration that is stipulated.”

Sasha likes helping others by making a difference in their lives. She achieves this by participating in community projects where she trains students in terms of social skills. She is happy that the scope of practice allows her to participate in community upliftment projects.

“And then also the group work that you can do, and the community work. I also do a lot of group work in the community, training students as well. And I think my registered counsellor’s scope gives me that leeway.”

Sasha gets a satisfactory feeling knowing that she managed to help someone who was facing life challenges.

Ah, it’s difficult to describe the feeling. I think more of a contentment, and .., and satisfaction, knowing that this person....well, you don’t get that often [laughing] they usually stop therapy when they feel better.

So when I hear, I’m glad. I’m glad that someone can move on in life.

...and I’m excited for them.

7.4.3 Working in a multidisciplinary team

Sasha’s experience as a registered counsellor has proved to her the need to treat a client holistically. She believes that to get this right, registered counsellors need to work hand in hand with other healthcare professionals.

“But , its , ya...psychologists, registered counsellors, OTs, we all are...actually need to work together because , um, officially when we work with children we see a lot of the same things coming up and no one knows how to work with it. So, if we work in a team then there’s a format ...”

Sasha mentions that the notion of referrals is important when working in a multidisciplinary team.

“Definitely, I believe we should all work in a multi-disciplinary team because you can be the first point on contact, work with the client then refer ... We know when to refer and where to refer.”

Sasha believes that doing referrals is embedded in the scope of practice. She is proud that registered counsellors work within the law in terms of following the scope of practice. She shares the following:

“Yes, and we follow certain conduct, so people will know we will, in our best ability act in their best interest also within the laws and within the scope of practice knowing that we refer when we need to refer.”

Sasha’s opinion is that registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa because they deal with less complex mental health issues and they leave the most clinical cases to other healthcare professionals, thus the importance of working in a multidisciplinary team.

“I feel in South Africa registered counsellors can play a big part in the filtering of clients and helping them go to the right places.

...Freeing the hands of the other professionals to deal with the most, you know, most difficult cases or the most clinical cases.”

7.4.4 Registered Counsellors as first point of entry

Sasha believes that registered counsellors are relevant and important in South Africa because they were born out of the need to help people on the ground, that is, disadvantaged people with psychological interventions.

“I think the role of the registered counsellors is very relevant in our context especially because we’re working on primary intervention on the ground.

...it provides such a primary service at ground level that can actually be a good thing in terms of going forward.”

She believes that being the first point of entry is beneficial because it will help other healthcare professionals in terms of concentrating on severe cases.

“...Freeing the hands of other professionals to deal with the most, you know, most difficult cases or the most clinical cases.”

7.4.5 Affordable fees

According to Sasha, registered counsellors are relevant in South Africa because the fees they charge in terms of services rendered are more affordable as compared to other healthcare professionals.

“...they can commit to therapy for the duration stipulated because it is financially more viable than for say, the psychologist.

*...we are people offering services that you can afford and at very reduced rates.
...So I feel in our context, especially in our country, we need more registered counsellors.”*

Sasha believes that registered counsellors have a future in South Africa because their services are more accessible to people unlike the services offered by psychologists.

*“People don’t necessarily have access to all relevant mental health services.
registered counsellors’ services is the one that would help and assist.*

*...Psychology services is a luxury. Um, and the psychologists are so few and far,
you know, you can’t, it’s difficult to find one.”*

Sasha is happy that the medical aids have recognised their services in terms of dealing with mental health problems and as a result started paying for the services at reduced tariffs.

“Um, we are a cash practice so, but I’m...contracted in, so people can claim back.

And I set my fees according to Discovery rates so that comes from savings...

Yes, they pay. They pay, there’s a certain rate they pay for the registered counsellor, and is lesser.”

7.4.6 Experiencing barriers

Sasha feels that registered counsellors often experience challenges in terms of trying to ascertain their role. She believes that the lack of recognition makes people to devalue the services rendered by registered counsellors.

She feels that sometimes registered counsellors themselves are uncertain about their roles because the scope of practice is vague when it comes to specifying what exactly is it they are supposed to do in dealing with psychological problems. Her opinion is that being in private practice is a good idea because many registered counsellors are struggling to find jobs.

The following barriers were identified:

7.4.6.1 Lack of recognition

Sasha is of the view that people do not recognise registered counsellors because their role is confusing. She believes that even registered counsellors sometimes do not have a clear understanding of their role because the scope of practice is vague.

“It’s a very vague understanding because everyone has got their own context of what you’re supposed to do. Um, I think the scope...Look the scope is quite vague.

So I feel that they...the role is a bit vague, and I think people are uncertain. I have seen my colleagues as well not certain when to tread.

It’s very gray at some point.”

This lack of recognition makes people not to value the services rendered by registered counsellors. Sasha shared the following:

“Um, I even see in schools where we can provide the, the basics service that you do not need the psychologist for.

Schools all believe that if you are not a psychologist the, the value is not there.

...like our profession it does not give a credibility perhaps.”

Sasha believes that the lack of recognition causes many registered counsellors struggle in terms of finding jobs. She is of the opinion that having a private practice puts her in an advantaged position.

“Like I see other registered counsellors looking for jobs because they can’t make it in the field.

So, I’m in a very, um, a very good position in terms of, um, my own practice.”

7.4.6.2 Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals

Sasha believes that people confuse registered counsellors and counsellors because people freely refer to themselves as “counsellors”.

“....and that is the free market as we call it, where people will study for a week or so and call themselves counsellors.

Lay counsellors, church counsellors, you know the ...

Even from a volunteer...just volunteer and say we are doing counselling.

People act without a body governing them but the word counsellor is used to refer to them.”

Sasha believes that the solution for this confusion is a change of name. She shares the following:

“Um, I think it could be so good to get another name first...because, um...

If you see a registered counsellor they would know the protocol is to do a first follow up, make sure. If you see someone that is just a counsellor they don't know what the protocol is and could cause more harm than good.”

7.4.6.3 The role of HPCSA

According to Sasha, the Health Professional Council of South Africa as the governing body for health professionals is responsible to promote the services of registered counsellors. She is disappointed that the HPCSA is not playing any active role in promoting the category of registered counsellors.

“Um, in my opinion they're not, um, the important and the value of registered counsellors are not promoted by our professional council.

So I feel that there's not enough done to promote the service of registered counsellors.”

Sasha feels sad that registered counsellors are not promoted. Her feelings are as a result of a comparison she makes between registered counsellors and psychologists. She is of the opinion that registered counsellors should be promoted like psychologists because in terms of the expectations from the HPCSA the two categories are almost the same.

“And if you think of it, us registered counsellors have to give exactly the same CPD points as psychologists. So our input is the same in terms of getting training, staying up to date, paying fees.

I pay exactly the same medical insurance, professional insurance than a psychologist. I'm paying the same annual fees but I don't get the same support, say, um, coverage and promotion for that."

Sasha thinks that the HPCSA creates misconceptions by this lack of promotion in terms of registered counsellors being cancelled. She feels strongly that despite all these challenges, there is a future for registered counsellors in South Africa because they offer a crucial service to communities.

"But my concern is that it seems to be something that's got to be cancelled. But it shouldn't because it provides such a primary service at ground level...

...and I think if utilised properly it can actually have so many benefits."

7.5 Personal reflections

Reflecting back at the conversation with Sasha, the researcher acknowledges that Sasha's interest lies in helping people who experienced traumatic events. She believes that her personality makes it possible to help people who are traumatised. The researcher acknowledges this because during the interview Sasha was calm and contained even after the whole day in counselling sessions.

Her main concern is children and this is the reason why she goes all out to schools to promote her services. She likes making a difference in other people's lives by volunteering in community projects where she trains students on social skills.

The researcher acknowledges that Sasha is passionate about the work that registered counsellors do because she is of the view that they offer an essential service to the community. She believes in healthcare professionals working together to treat clients holistically.

Sasha believes that registered counsellors are not recognised because the Health Professional Council of South Africa does not promote their scope of work. She is alarmed that the category of registered counsellors might be cancelled and cautions against this because she believes that registered counsellors' services are important, accessible and affordable.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the story of Sasha was provided. The interview transcript between Sasha and the researcher was analysed. Themes were identified according to the aim of the study. The following themes were identified:

- **The need to help others**

Sasha's need to help others was ignited by what people around her were experiencing in life. These people were going through traumatic stages brought about by violence and crime. This pushed her to specialise in trauma counselling in order to help people. Sasha is a calm and contained person. These personality traits enable her to deal with trauma in terms of counselling others. Her main interest is helping children. She reaches out to children by promoting her services in schools around her neighborhood.

When planning counselling sessions for children, she makes sure to involve parents because she believes that parents play an important role in terms of committing to the counselling sessions. When counselling children, she prefers using play mediums because she understands that sometimes trauma makes it difficult for one to talk about the experience.

- **Feeling of fulfillment**

Sasha had positive experiences in terms of being a registered counsellor. She is happy that clients always commit to therapy till the end. This makes her feel good because it means people understand the importance of therapy in terms of dealing with their problems. Sasha believes in helping people by making a difference in their lives. She achieves this by helping out in community projects where she trains students in social skills and maintaining a positive self-esteem. She is happy that the scope of practice allows her to be involved in community outreach programmes.

She always has a feeling of contentment knowing that a person has attended all the therapy sessions and is able to move on with life. It gives her a feeling of fulfillment knowing that she has helped a client get back to their normal self.

- **Working in a multidisciplinary team**

Sasha believes that registered counsellors are relevant because they work hand in hand with other health care professionals. She is of the view that a client needs to be helped holistically and this can only be made possible by different specialisation of healthcare professionals working together.

She mentions the importance of referrals in terms of directing clients with more severe cases to relevant practitioners. She is happy that the scope of practice allows registered counsellors to refer when the need arises. The scope of practice helps registered counsellors to work within the law because it guides them about their role.

- **Registered Counsellors as first point of entry**

Sasha believes that registered counsellors are important and relevant in South Africa because they work on primary interventions on the ground. This basically means that they are the first people to be consulted in terms of offering basic psychological interventions. She believes that working on primary interventions is important because other professionals such as psychologists will concentrate on more severe clinical cases.

- **Affordable fees**

Sasha stresses the relevance and future of registered counsellors in South Africa by indicating that their services are more affordable as compared to services offered by psychologists. She believes that the affordability of registered counsellors' services makes clients commit to therapy knowing that they will be able to pay. She is of the opinion that registered counsellors are more accessible unlike psychologists who are difficult to find especially for people who are disadvantaged. She feels that medical aid paying for registered counsellors' services at a lesser rate confirms that they have a future in South Africa.

- **Experiencing barriers**

Three types of barriers were identified under this theme, namely, lack of recognition, confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals and the role of HPCSA.

Lack of recognition

Sasha is saddened that registered counsellors often experience barriers when trying to ascertain their role. She is of the opinion that this lack of recognition makes people not to give registered counsellors' services any value. She experienced this when visiting schools to promote her services. She shared that schools believe that value is only offered by psychologists.

She believes that the lack of recognition causes registered counsellors to struggle in terms of finding jobs. She regards herself as fortunate since she is in private practice.

She believes that registered counsellors themselves are sometimes unsure about their role because the scope of practice is somehow vague.

Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals

Sasha's main concern is people who regard themselves as counsellors without the relevant qualifications and a governing body. She regards the counselling environment as a free market where anyone can just be referred to as a counselor because they have studied for a week or are volunteering in a counselling environment.

She believes that the word counsellor causes confusions and the solution will be that registered counsellors be given another name. She hopes a change of name will clear the confusion because people will understand who registered counsellors are and what their role entails.

The role of HPCSA

Sasha's opinion is that the Health Professional Council of South Africa is not doing enough to promote the services of registered counsellors in terms of informing the public about the importance and value of registered counsellors. She compares registered counsellors with psychologists and feels that psychologists are more promoted than registered counsellors. She regards this as unfair because registered counsellors need to get the same CPD points as psychologists, pay the annual fees as psychologists and give the same inputs in terms of training as psychologists. She maintains that the lack of activity from the Health Professional Council of South Africa makes registered counsellors to think that their category will be cancelled from the HPCSA in the near future. She hopes that the category will never be cancelled because registered counsellors offer psychological services that have many benefits to the community.

CHAPTER 8: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore stories of registered counsellors about their relevance and future in South Africa. This chapter provides a comparison between the themes that were identified after an analysis of the participants responses to questions presented to them during the interviews and reported in the literature. These interviews were conducted as set out in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The themes that re-occurred in all the three interviews are the following:

- The need to help others
- Feeling of fulfillment
- Working in multidisciplinary team
- Registered counsellors as first point of entry
- Experiencing barriers
 - Lack of recognition
 - Confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals
 - The role of HPCSA

8.2 The need to help others

All three registered counsellors showed the need to help others. Helping can be explained as enabling people to change and the aim is to assist people to take control of their lives (Swain, 1995).

For two registered counsellors this need to help others stemmed from personal experiences about situations that were challenging while the other one it was due to the

bad experiences of those around her. Hutchison (2012) believes that people consider becoming counsellors after overcoming some major life difficulties.

Kait's bad life experience resulted in the need for her to help people experiencing challenges as she did. McLeod & McLeod (2011) state that self-awareness helps the counsellor to know that the person seeking help is similar to them in some way; and this will result in the counselor providing a rounded, human response since he or she has previously explored their own experience of the issue.

Similar to Kait is Mary who went through a difficult time at school and had the need to help learners who struggle at school. McLeod & McLeod (2011) further state that self-awareness is central to a counsellor's ability to relate to the experiences of the person who is seeking help.

Rouillard et al (2016) in their research about registered counsellor's perceptions of their role in the South African context of providing mental health-care services found that registered counsellors acquired their qualification because of the desire to assist people who experience mental health difficulties. Brew & Kottler (2008) believe that people who experience difficulties feel stuck because of perceived lack of choices. Kait believes that registered counsellors help people by giving them new perspective in life. She mentions:

"I love getting into people's private space and getting a better knowledge of their perspectives about life and the type of challenges that they are facing and seeing what difference can one make in terms of you know, giving someone a different light to what they are perceiving or, you know, tapping into somebody's hidden strength, ah, and making them visible."

The desire to help others is usually motivated by empathy, which can be described as a “tendency to respond to another’s emotional state with vicarious feelings resembling the emotions of others”. (Baron & Byrne, 1997, p. 367).

The three registered counsellors believe that a counsellor’s personality is important in the process of helping others. Gladding (1996) is in agreement because he views the counselor’s personality as crucial in determining the effectiveness of the counselling process.

Sasha is calm and contained and this for her is a strength when helping others. Her calm personality helps her in active listening. Cappuzzi & Gross (2009) view active listening as important because it helps counselors to be sure that they are hearing the client accurately and this will assure the client that the counsellor has fully heard them. Mary believes that she is an optimist who is a good listener and this assists her to help others effectively. This is important as McLeod & McLeod (2011) acknowledge that good counsellors are good listeners. Nelson-Jones (2002, p. 6) concludes that “counsellors with good listening skills can comfort, ease suffering and heal psychological wounds”. Furthermore, this also provides safe emotional climate for clients to experience and share feelings (Nelson-Jones 2002, p. 73).

Kait believes that she is open minded and that helping people comes naturally to her because she is non-judgmental.

This can also be referred to as unconditional positive regard where the counsellor accepts the client without evaluation or judgement (Capuzzi & Gross, 2009). Capuzzi & Gross (2009) further acknowledge that a non-judgmental counselor allows clients to be open

and be themselves because they understand the counsellor will not judge them or what they say. This is true for Kait as she said:

“Sometimes you find yourself interacting with people and people just genuinely open up to you naturally without, you know, them feeling fearful or feeling that, you know what, this particular person will judge me”.

From the above discussions the relevance of the three registered counsellors can be unpacked as follows:

Firstly, they all possess the components of a helping relationship, namely; empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard. Secondly, they believe in helping others by helping themselves get new perspectives in life.

This is relevant because counselling is regarded as a process whereby the counsellor helps the client to do his or her problem solving (Etherington, 2001; Wicks, 1979). This is in line with social constructionist principle that takes into consideration the strength of the clients. Thirdly, they are subjectively involved in the counselling process which is a key component of social constructionism. For them, as with the belief of postmodernism, counselling is a social, rather than a psychological process (Etherington, 2001). That is, the process of counselling is regarded as a conversation between the counsellor and the client.

It is through this social interaction that the client and counsellor construct realities. Social constructionists aim for collaboration between the client and counsellor in the communication process (Lit and Shek, 2002), since language provides the basis for all our thoughts (Burr, 1995). According to Cassey Chambers, the operations director at

SADAG, the intervention of skilled professional counsellors is key in dealing with mental health in South Africa and he stresses that the first step to helping clients deal with mental health challenges is to get them 'talk' about it. Burr (2015) concurs that people construct particular accounts of what the world is like when we think and talk about the world. Durrheim (1997, p.180) on the other hand asserts that "language and communication are cultural practices within which the various realities one encounters are constituted".

According to SADAG, this is in line with dealing with mental health problems in South Africa because addressing the cultural belief system at play is crucial for finding ways to best help clients and their families.

Lastly, according to the HPCSA (form 258) the role of registered counsellors is to help with preventative interventions that focus on support and promote the enhancement of wellbeing in community context. This proves the relevance of the three registered counsellors in South Africa because they regard their role as one of helping people by giving them new perspective in life.

8.3 Feeling of fulfillment

All the three registered counsellors conceded that they felt good after helping others and making a difference in one's life.

In her research, Fischer (2017) found that some of registered counsellors she interviewed hoped that their role would fulfill their passion for helping and empowering people and this resulted in a feeling of fulfillment after they had helped someone.

Kate mentions;

“And then that is the best, you know, feeling ever in terms of assisting those around you, or those you meet within your path”.

Similar to Kait is Sasha who says:

“I think more of a contentment, and .., and satisfaction, knowing that this person....well, you don’t get that often [laughing] they usually stop therapy when they feel better”.

Baron & Byrne (1997) are of the view that if the need to help is clear, it will result in positive emotions and positive emotions result in prosocial behavior. Prosocial behavior can be defined as the act of helping others without benefits for the person who helps (Baron & Byrne, 1997).

In their quest to explain why people help, Baron & Byrne (1997) proposed an Empathetic Joy Hypothesis in which a situation leads to a desire to act and result in a positive effect on the victim. The successful outcome of the act makes the helper to feel good.

It can be concluded that Mary and Sasha showed altruistic behavior. Baron & Byrne (1997) define altruism as an unselfish concern for the welfare of others. Both Mary and Sasha are helping disadvantaged students in a community project because they want to make a difference in other people’s lives.

Sasha says;

“I also do a lot of group work in the community, training students as well”.

On the other hand Mary says;

“We have a program called, ah, Saturday school where we have...kids....from a poor background. I’m actually part of the program and...and we do extra lessons with them on Saturday, extra English.....and Maths.”

Research has also found that altruistic individuals are often characterised as having an internal locus of control and they believe in social responsibility that we should all do our best to help others and have lower measure of ego-centrism (Baron & Byrne, 1997). Hackl et al (2007) as cited in Govender (2014) concur because they also found that good counsellors had intrinsic motivators.

8.4 Working in a multidisciplinary team

“Coming together is a beginning; Keeping together is progress; Working together is success” (Henry Ford).

The three registered counsellors believe that this category has a future in South Africa because they work in a multidisciplinary team. They stress that working together or collaborating is important as it benefits the client that is dealing with mental health issues.

Working in a multiprofessional context is effective if the following factors are considered (Swain, 1995):

- There are agreed goals in the help being offered;
- There is trust in personal and professional relationships;
- There is open, full and regular communication between the professionals;
- There is parity and equality in decision making.

Kait is collaborating with other healthcare professionals at her workplace to help people with psychological problems. She states;

“We work in a multi-disciplinary team whereby we have a lot of people that we are working with. So, for 80% of the time we find ourselves working with other professionals in terms of assisting people with psychological services.”

Similar to Kait is Mary who works in partnership with a psychologist. By working together with other health care professionals, there is often interaction and this is in line with the social constructionists’ belief that through interactions between people, we construct knowledge and understanding of the world (Burr, 1995). Mary practices this at her workplace. She shares the following:

“And then I have my educational psychologist that I know and that I work with, and they would then do the assessment. Um, they would come to school and I would organise that I would meet the teacher of the child, or the teachers depending, um..., depending on the case, maybe the parents. Um...the educational psychologist and myself and we have like the round table we then discuss how we can support the child.”

Morley & Cashell (2017, p. 208) define collaboration as;

“an efficient, effective and satisfying way to offer health care services through a process by which inter-dependent professional are structuring a collective action toward patient’s care and needs”

Sasha believes that by working together, healthcare professionals complement each other in terms of competencies. She says;

”But , its, ya...psychologists, registered counsellors, OTs, we all are...actually need to work together because , um, officially when we work with children we see a lot of the same things coming up and no one knows how to work with it. So, if we work in a team then there’s a format”.

Etherington (2001) concurs that collaboration helps by recognising that one person’s contribution complement and strengthen the contribution of the other. Manthei (1997) is of the opinion that goals reached in collaboration usually last longer because each party has had a major role in achieving them. This is the stance taken by Mary when she states that;

“The educational psychologist and myself we have like the round table we then discuss how we can support the child.”

Petersen & Lund (2011) found that one way of closing the gaps in community based psychosocial programmes in South Africa is to employ an integrated primary mental healthcare.

This will ensure identification and referrals of mental disorders to either medical or psychological treatment. This is relevant in terms of the three registered counsellors who believe that referrals to other healthcare professionals benefit the client.

They believe that any issue in terms of mental health that falls beyond their competencies needs a referral. With regards to this, Kait said the following:

“Health related issues whereby we would be able to appropriately refer clients to specialists and so forth”.

Similarly, Mary had the following to say:

“I would say my main referrals are to educational psychologists when I feel there’s an academic assessment necessary”.

Sasha believes that it is important to know which healthcare professionals to refer to.

“We know when to refer and where to refer”.

8.5 Registered Counsellors as the first point of entry

The three registered counsellors that were interviewed have a clear understanding in terms of the reasons why the category of registered counsellors was created. They emphasised that the category of registered counsellors was created to help people on the ground who experience mental health challenges. That is, registered counsellors are the first in line to be consulted for mental health issues.

Kait had the following to say in this regard:

“...and being the first hand whereby we make contact with people and establish rapport.’ and ‘We are the first people that have access in terms of, you know, providing basic counselling interventions to fellow South Africans”.

Similarly, Mary explains;

‘The category is to reach people that wouldn’t otherwise have ...access to psychological services.’

Pretorius (2012) refers to registered counsellors as emotional paramedics in terms of assisting with the well-being of others. Kait is in agreement as she refers to registered counsellors as first aid for people with mental health problems.

Pillay (2016) also views the category of registered counsellors as important because he regards it as a necessary mid-level psychology profession. South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP) views the category of registered counsellors as relevant because registered counsellors play a role in alleviating the heavy burden placed on mental health services in South Africa.

As first point of entry, the three registered counsellors agree that the scope of practice is clear in terms of dictating that they have to provide primary interventions on the ground.

Pretorius (2012, p. 512) defines the scope of practice as follows;

‘The range or extent of matters that a psychologist and/or registered counsellor can deal with according to the special skills that required by the category.’

Sasha had the following to say with regards to registered counsellors being the first point of entry;

"I think the role of registered counsellors is very relevant in our context especially because we're working on primary interventions on the ground."

Mary's comment on the above is that they (registered counsellors) are required to perform basic psychological screening. Kait on the other hand had the following say;

'We are the first people that have access in terms of, you know, providing basic counselling interventions to fellow South Africans.'

This gives a clear indication that the three registered counsellors are well vested in terms of what is required of them because the (HPCSA, form 258) dictates clearly that one of the role of registered counsellors is the promotion of primary psychosocial well-being.

According to SADAG, only 27% of South Africans who are reporting mental illness receive treatment. registered counsellors are crucial in this case because SADAG believes that the primary burden of mental healthcare falls on community based providers. That is, counsellors step in where institutionalised help is not available. This proves the relevance of registered counsellors in South Africa as they are the first line of defense.

The question still remains that who is supposed to provide secondary psychological interventions. This is addressed by the three registered counsellors who agree that psychologists are the ones to deal with more severe cases. Mary had this to say regarding the issue;

‘ ..because advanced psychological screening and interventions is done by psychologists’

Sasha on the other hand said this;

“...Freeing the hands of other professionals to deal with the most, you know, most difficult cases or the most clinical cases”.

Elkonin & Sandison (2010) believe that registered counsellors are important because they take pressure off psychologists who can then focus on more difficult cases. Mary takes it further to say the following:

“So they don’t necessarily need to be sent through to a psychologists in terms of making diagnosis or having prolonged therapy”.

Abel & Louw (2007) agree that the competencies of registered counsellors differ from those of psychologists who are expected to provide more complex and specialised function.

One of the strategies to scale up services for mental health is the development of human resources for mental health (Burgess (2012) as cited in Fischer (2017). This goes hand in hand with the reason why the HPCSA created the category of registered counsellors. It confirms the relevance of registered counsellors in a sense that they are available to deal with mental health in communities.

8.6 Experiencing barriers

Previous research done on registered counsellors found that this category faces many challenges in terms of lack of recognition, the inactive role played by HPCSA and confusion between registered counsellors as well as other healthcare professionals (Elkonin & Sandison, (2006); Abel & Louw, (2007), (2009); Kotze & Corolissen, (2005); Rouillard et al, 2016).

Watson and Fouche (2007) as cited in Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2011) have found three themes in terms of threats to the counselling profession. Firstly, they found that there are doubts regarding the professional status of the counselling profession. Secondly, the potential of the counselling profession being isolated and lastly, that there are macro systematic issues that could have negative impact on the profession's service delivery.

The barriers that were identified by the three registered counsellors are the following:

- Lack of recognition
- Confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals
- The role of HPCSA

Lack of recognition

Mary, Sasha and Kait experienced some frustrations in terms of their category not being recognised. This has caused many professional problems for registered counsellors. Du Preez & Roos (2008, p. 699) discovered that “the position of the counsellors remains complex and unsatisfactory”.

The lack of recognition might be as a result of vague scope of practice which in turn makes their role not to be understood and taken seriously. Elkonin & Sandison (2010) found that registered counsellors believe the scope of practice is vague in terms of the dividing line between the competency of the registered counsellors and the psychologists.

Mary was lucky because she had to come up with her own job description

“I think initially when I started working at the school there was a lot of confusion what exactly am i... because I’m not a psychologist. First of all, I had to write my own job description at the school because the school did not have job descriptions for a registered counsellor [laughing].”

Sasha thinks that the vague scope of practice causes registered counsellors to be uncertain about their role. She says;

“So I feel that they...the role is a bit vague, and I think people are uncertain. I have seen my colleagues as well not certain when to tread”.

This is in agreement with previous research where Rouillard et al (2016) found that some registered counsellors were unsure of their own role and the changing scope of practice.

Rouillard et al (2016) also note that the qualification of registered counsellors itself was vague in terms of the information available on completing the degree and what could be done with the qualification.

Kait thinks that their role is just completely misunderstood by the public and this causes confusion. She says;

“Our role is quite, you know, not completely understood by various people, various organisations. So there is still a struggle within South African context in terms of being recognised as we should be”.

According to previous research, the lack of recognition leads to lack of job opportunities for registered counsellors. Elkonin & Sandison (2006); Abel & Louw (2009); Kotze & Corolissen (2005) found that registered counsellors were struggling to find jobs fit for their category. Pillay (2016) concurs with their findings because he believes that the professional body failed to make sure that the job market created employment opportunities for registered counsellors.

Elkonin & Sandison (2006) found that some registered counsellors were so despondent that they referred to this act as ‘a nearly impossible task’. Fischer (2017) goes further to refer to it as reality kicking in for registered counsellors. This is where she found that registered counsellors started to realise that there was lack of employment opportunities, lack of recognition from the public as well as lack of confidence in registered counsellors fulfilling their role in terms of the reason the category was created.

Despite all the challenges regarding lack of employment opportunities, Kait feels that there is hope in terms progress for this category. She says;

“Slowly getting there...Um, I can see in government it’s quite, you know, a bit visible than it used, and So, yes, at the present moment there’s very few departments that are being aware of the role.

But it's quite limited when you look at the whole society that has, have that degree, ah...of being a registered counsellor compared to the number of vacancies that are made available at the current moment."

Sasha agrees that even though registered counsellors struggle with job opportunities, she feels lucky that she is not affected because she has a private practice. She feels that registered counsellors can be self-employed and not wait for jobs to be created for them. This is what she had to say in this regard;

"Like I see other registered counsellors looking for jobs because they can't make it in the field. So, I'm in a very, um, a very good position in terms of, um, my own practice"

Similar to Sasha is Mary who is happy that her workplace finally recognises her role. She says;

"... but now having been at the school for three years I think we've created enough awareness around what I do."

Research has found that some registered counsellors have continued to study for master's degree in psychology due to lack of job opportunities. Others had continued to study outside of their profession while others are working outside their profession and using different job titles depending on the work setting (Abel & Louw, 2007; Kotze & Corilissen, 2005).

Confusion between Registered Counsellors and other healthcare professionals

Kait views lack of recognition of registered counsellors as a result of people confusing this category with other healthcare professionals. She had a personal experience as far as this confusion is concerned. She shared the following:

“The registration was not quite recognised in terms of, you know, we would be remunerated according to lay counsellor.”

Mary on the other hand thinks that people do not respect registered counsellors as they do to psychologists. She says;

“...sometimes people looking down on you because they think, well, you are not a psychologist, you are only a counsellor”.

Sasha agrees with Mary’s sentiments because she also experienced similar challenge. She shared this;

“Schools all believe that if you are not a psychologist, the value is not there...like our profession it does not give a credibility perhaps”

The social constructionist views the societal context as quite significant. The theory’s view is that social communities in which people live create particular meanings and attitudes for them to live by (Staton, 2005). This might be the case with Kate and Sasha in terms of what the society in which they live view registered counsellors versus psychologists.

The social constructionists further state that there are dominant voices of accounts of reality that exist within the communities and these voices are supported by existing power structures. Social constructionists caution against the dominant beliefs in society that tend to disrespect others (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996) as cited in Stanton (2005).

In this case the dominant voices are the ones that view psychologists as more important than registered counsellors. Pretorius (2012) concurs because he believes that there is a discourse of power that operates within the psychology professional categories. He found that there is a hierarchy in the psychology profession and registered counsellors are at the bottom of this hierarchy. Mary believes that the situation is worsened by people in the psychology profession especially psychologists who disregard registered counsellors. She says;

“...and she heard I was a registered counsellor and she said to me, Oh, you have to carry on studying, you have to do your Masters, and you have to become a psychologist”.

Social constructionists warn against singular accounts whose power tend to further silence, exclude and treat those whom their stories fail to fit as insignificant. It prefers "stories that are based on a person's lived experience" rather than on "expert knowledge" (Doan, 1997, p. 130) as cited in Stanton (2005). This is the case with the psychologist who regards Mary as insignificant by the mere fact that she is a registered counsellor and not a psychologist. The registered counsellors that are interviewed in this study are relevant as per social constructionist principles in that the aim is to give them a voice in

the face of dominant beliefs that psychologists are more important than registered counsellors.

Research has also found that there is lack of trust and understanding about registered counsellors by other healthcare professionals (Rouillard et al, 2016). Abel & Louw (2007) on the other hand have found that there is a misconception created that registered counsellors are equivalent to psychologists or lay counsellors.

Mary and Sasha believe that one does not need to be a psychologist in order to deal with mental challenges. Being a registered counsellor is enough and beneficial. Mary says the following in this regard:

“I think as a registered counsellor you anyway have... going to a lot of workshops, um, getting your CPD points, so even if you didn’t do those extra years of Masters you are ensuring the whole time that you keep learning and keep growing, and you keep...gain valuable experience”.

This is relevant because according to HPCSA: Continuing Professional Development Guidelines for Health Care Practitioners (2017, p. 7), the purpose of CDP is “to assist the health practitioners to maintain and acquire new and updated levels of knowledge, skills and ethical attitudes that will be of measurable benefit in professional practice”.

Similarly Sasha believes that registered counsellors are good because they work within the law, she states;

“If you see a registered counsellor they would know the protocol is to do a first follow up, make sure”.

On a different note is Kate who wants to become a psychologist, she notes;

“...that’s where my actual love for wanting to become a psychologist came from. I just want to finish the policy implementation part of ...ah...public health first before I can enter into doing my masters in Psychology.”

Working within the social constructionists view, it is important for registered counsellors to be given a space to voice their non-dominant voice in terms of dealing with mental health issues which in turn prove their relevance and future in South Africa.

The role of HPCSA

The three registered counsellors voiced their dissatisfactions regarding the role that HPCSA is supposed to be playing in terms of promoting their category. Research conducted by Kotze & Corlissen (2005) has found that registered counsellors were not happy with the role that HPCSA is playing to portray registered counsellors. They believed that the HPCSA was tasked with the responsibility to educate the public regarding the role of registered counsellors but have failed.

Kait feels that the government is trying to teach the public about the role of registered counsellors but that is not enough since the HPCSA should take the lead. She said;

“So, I still feel at the present moment we are not as recognised as we should be because the Health Professional Council of South Africa is also not playing a part in terms of making our role visible to society. Yes, you find that there are

Government Gazettes that explain the role and so forth, but it's not as frequent as it should be".

A worrying factor was raised by the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, during his Budget Vote Debate Speech (15 May 2018) when he mentioned that people having minor mental illnesses do not usually receive help due to shortage of psychiatrists and psychologists (National Department of Health, 2018).

This is a concern because the category of registered counsellors was created to deal with these 'minor' mental health issues and as such the category should be promoted so that the public can understand their role.

Mary agrees that enough is not being done in this regard. She had this to say;

"Um, I don't think they are doing enough to make, um, to create awareness about registered counsellors."

Sasha on the other hand agrees that the HPCSA is not teaching the public about the value of this category. She said;

"Um, in my opinion they're not, um, the important and the value of registered counsellors are not promoted by our professional council. So I feel that there's not enough done to promote the service of registered counsellors".

Abel & Louw (2009) found that some registered counsellors regard the HPCSA as being unhelpful and inefficient in solving their challenges. They feel that there is an urgent need to market the profession. Abel & Louw (2007) also found that registered counsellors

regarded the HPCSA as disinterested and unconcerned regarding their category and that there is a need to promote the category.

This lack of visibility on the part of the HPCSA in terms of promoting the category of registered counsellors creates some uncertainties and misconceptions. Mary is concerned that the category might be cancelled. She had this to say;

“And lately there has been this thing whereby our role is going to be discontinued, hence, you know, it’s also questionable because it’s not being public, ah, it’s not put to the public what type of role we have”

Sasha feels the same way and raises the following concern:

“But my concern is that it seems to be something that’s got to be cancelled”.

The same has been found that lack of visibility creates doubts because registered counsellors are not sure of what will happen next in terms of their category.

They believe that insufficient information supplied by the HPCSA to the public causes insecurities around the profession of registered counsellors (Rouillard et al, 2016).

8.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the themes were discussed in relation to previous literature. Most of these themes seem to link with literature about the role and future of registered counsellors in South Africa. The following themes were identified: the need to help others, feeling of fulfillment, working in a multidisciplinary team, registered counsellors as the first point of

entry and experiencing barriers. It is important to note that the themes need to be considered in the unique context of each participant.

The prominent theme that the researcher felt emerged from this study was that of the need to help others. This is the core in terms of the relevance and future of registered counsellors. The registered counsellors that were interviewed in this study constructed their stories as people who want to help others by making a difference in their lives in terms of tapping into the clients' strength (one of the principles of social constructionism).

This is a concern as South Africa has experienced many deaths in terms of mental health problems. In the past months, many people have been battling with depression and this requires people such as registered counsellors to come on board and offer their skills in terms of helping people to deal with mental health issues.

The registered counsellors in this study place emphasis on interaction with clients. This is relevant in terms of social constructionist principle in that through social interaction, people come together to construct reality. During this interaction, language is considered as a positive contributing factor when it comes to providing the basis for all our thoughts.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

The study will be evaluated in terms of highlighting its strength and limitations. A short summary of how the research question was addressed will be given as well as a short summary of each participant's story. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for further research.

9.2 Evaluating the study

This study aimed to give a voice to three people who constructed themselves as registered counsellors. The study hoped that through their life stories, rich information will emerge around their unique experiences and meanings. Their stories have assisted the researcher as an active participant in co-constructing their experiences.

It is important to note that this study did not intend to generalise its findings to a larger population. The findings are not finite but remain a co-construction of the personal experiences as shared by the participants and the researcher. The researcher believes that the aim of this study was accomplished in that each participant's story was unique and rich with experience and personal meanings.

Themes that emerged from each participant's story were discussed. This was then followed by the comparative analysis from each story in conjunction with previous literature. It is important to note that even though the stories from each participant were unique, the comparative analysis revealed some similarities in terms of themes.

The following themes were identified as common themes across all the participants.

- The need to help
- Feeling of fulfillment
- Working in a multidisciplinary team
- Registered counsellors as first point of entry
- Experiencing barriers
 - Lack of recognition
 - Confusion between registered counsellors and other healthcare professionals
 - The role of HPCSA.

To assist in answering the research question and fulfilling the aim of the research, the following were addressed:

- **What led the participants to become Registered Counsellors**

The findings revealed that the participants decided to become registered counsellors because of their need to help other people. This need came about because of the life challenges they experienced, be it personal experiences or experiences of people around them. Hutchison (2012) is of the opinion that people consider becoming counsellors after overcoming major life difficulties.

The participants help in terms of making clients realise their strength and abilities. Wicks (1979) considers counselling as a process of exploration and discovery where the counsellor helps the client to do their own problem-solving. Social constructionist concurs in that they take into consideration the strength of the client.

All the participants regarded their personalities as enablers in term of establishing relationships. Being a good listener and non-judgmental were considered personality traits that made a good counsellor.

- **The relevance of Registered Counsellors in South Africa**

More common is that all the three registered counsellors believe that their category is highly relevant in South Africa. They believe that their services are highly needed in terms of the well-being of the society. Their services can be offered in different settings such as schools, organisations and even in private practice. The scope of practice seems to be admired in that it gave a leeway for registered counsellors to do community services in terms of community outreach projects. Altruistic individuals are often characterised as having internal locus of control, believe in social responsibility that we should all do our best to help others and had lower measure of ego-centrism (Baron & Byrne, 1997).

Although all the participants agree that their services are not promoted, they still believe that they will play their part in promoting the category so that the public will understand the role they play in South Africa.

- **Is there a future for Registered Counsellor in South Africa**

The findings reveal that there is a future for registered counsellors which is closing the gap when it comes to mental health in South Africa. According to WHO (2007), in terms of human resources, there is substantial mental health workforce shortage. SADAG is of the opinion that skilled professional counsellors are key in dealing with mental health in South Africa.

South African College of Applied Psychology (SACAP) on the other hand views the category of registered counsellors as important because registered counsellors play a role in alleviating the heavy burden placed on mental health services in South Africa.

The three registered counsellors believe that as the first point of entry, their services are needed in South Africa in terms of providing basic psychological intervention. The minister of Health, Dr. Aaron Motsoaledi, in his budget vote debate speech (15 May 2018) acknowledged that people who were screened and found to be having minor mental illnesses do not usually receive help because of shortage of mental health professionals. This is evident enough that registered counsellors have a future in South Africa since they are the ones to deal with primary mental health problems (HPCSA, form 258; Elkonin & Sandison, 2010; Abel & Louw, 2008).

Summary of Kait's story

From the conversation with Kait, the researcher acknowledges that Kait is a strong woman who is eager to help others. Her traumatic life experience made her to be strong and to believe in herself in terms of checking her strengths and using them to get out of negative situations. This has taught her to be non-judgmental when coming to helping people. It is clear that Kait feels good after helping other people. She feels strongly about the category of registered counsellors in terms of the important role it has in mental health delivery. Working in EAP has given her the chance to use her qualification to the fullest and she is happy that her employer recognises her qualifications and gets remunerated accordingly. Her workplace has also given her an opportunity to work hand in hand with other healthcare professionals in terms of doing referrals.

Kait feels that registered counsellors are important and relevant because they are the first contact in terms of helping people with mental health issues. She regards this as crucial because people sometimes just need to 'talk' to someone so that they can function effectively instead of prolonged therapy.

Kait is concerned that the category of registered counsellors might be cancelled because the public does not recognise them. There are some misconceptions regarding the role of registered counsellors due to the fact that HPCSA does not play an active role in promoting them. Despite all these challenges, Kait feels that the category of registered counsellors is extremely relevant in South Africa and that there is a future for these professionals. She acknowledges that some government departments have already started advertising jobs for registered counsellors which signals that there is future for them.

Summary of Mary's story

From the dialogue with Mary, the researcher gathers that Mary's bad experiences in high school still affect her even in her adulthood life. This was picked up and confirmed by her during the conversation when she mentioned that she tries to avoid big crowds. Her Christian upbringing coupled with her high school experience are believed to have led to her need to help other people. She is always happy that she could make a difference in other people's lives. She achieves this by participating in a community outreach project where she helps disadvantaged learners with social skills.

She is happy that her workplace recognises her qualification although she had to come up with her own job description and made sure that people understand her role as a registered counsellor. She believes in working in a multi-professional context and feels that this helps in dealing with a client holistically. Her opinion about the category of registered counsellors is that it is very important and relevant because they deal with primary psychological interventions. This is important because it alleviates the burden that psychologists have to bear in terms of dealing with psychological problems. Mary is proud about her profession and feels that it is not necessary to become a psychologist because registered counsellors are accessible and affordable.

She feels let down by the HPCSA because of not promoting the category, which results in lack of job opportunities, lack of recognition and sometimes the disregard from other healthcare professionals. Despite all of these challenges, she regards the category of registered counsellors as relevant and believes there is a future for registered counsellors in South Africa.

Summary of Sasha's story

Sasha believes in helping people who experienced traumatic events. She is more interested in children because she can make use of different therapy methods when a client finds it difficult to verbalise her or his traumatic experience. She regards parents as crucial in terms of co-constructing the therapy process for their children.

She regards this as a way of committing to therapy. She feels good after helping a client to get back to his or her normal functioning. She also believes in empowering other people by making a difference in their lives.

She achieves this by participating in community outreach projects where she trains students in social skills, bullying and maintaining a positive self-esteem. She is one of the luckiest registered counsellors who is not affected by the unemployment crisis in the field because she is in private practice. She believes that lack of employment opportunities, lack of recognition, misconceptions between registered counsellors and lay counsellors result in the category lacking credibility. Her hope is for the HPCSA to be more active in promoting the category and making the scope of practice to be clearer in terms of what is expected of registered counsellors. She is also alarmed that the category might be cancelled but at the same time she feels that this should not happen because it is relevant and important in helping with mental health challenges. She is hopeful that going forward people will understand the important role that the registered counsellors play in alleviating mental health burdens in South Africa.

9.3 Strength of the study

The following were noted as strengths of the study:

- a) This study provides the stories of three registered counsellors regarding their relevance and future in South Africa. The study did not intend to generalise the findings to a larger population of registered counsellors, but to give a voice to the three registered counsellors in order to get an understanding about the reasons they became registered counsellors in relation to their relevance and future in the South African context.

- b) By giving the three registered counsellors a voice, the reader will get an understanding of the world from a viewpoint of a registered counsellor. The three registered counsellors got a chance to speak and have a voice in the dominating environment profession of psychologists (Pretorius, 2012).
- c) The study allowed for a co-constructed reality to emerge between the researcher and the participants during the interviews. This is in line with the social constructionist perspective. The researcher was thus able to bring her own questions and experiences as a registered counsellor to the conversations. It must be noted that the researcher's contribution during the interviews was always guided by participants as she took into consideration that the participants are experts.
- d) Since the study uses qualitative research methods, data collection method in the form of interviews was used because it is mainly about "interpreting and getting a good understanding of words, stories, accounts and explanations of our research respondents" (Matthew & Ross, 2010, p. 373).
- e) Triangulation which is basically about employing different methods to study the same research question was achieved. This was achieved by data triangulation where different data sources such as data from interviews and literature were used.

- f) The participants were informed about the aims and process of the research. Ethical considerations in terms of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality as well as considerations of participants' rights were taken into consideration.

9.4 Limitations to the study

Several limitations to this study were noted, namely:

- a) The acknowledgement by the researcher that her presentations and interpretations of the stories were likely to be coloured by her own perceptions and values.
- b) This may have led to the researcher influencing how the interviews were constructed in terms of the questions asked.
- c) The acknowledgement by the researcher that the way she wrote each participant's story as well as the themes that emerged were also coloured by her own lens.
- d) The final outcome of the study cannot be considered as an absolute truth about registered counsellors in general or about the three registered counsellors in this study. Social constructionists take into consideration that all research is coloured by the researcher's perspective and they reject the notion that research findings can be accurate reflections of reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999; Burr, 2012).

- e) The study was biased in terms of all the three registered counsellors being females.
- f) Telephone interviews were used with two participants; while one participant was interviewed face-to-face. Qualitative researchers take into consideration natural setting where participants live and work (Creswell, 2007). This helps in that the researcher talks directly with the participants to see how they behave within their context. However, qualitative methodology is not rigidly set out from the start but allows the researcher flexibility (Stanton, 2005).

9.5 Recommendation for future research

The category of registered counsellors in comparison with the other categories in the psychology field is unknown. More research needs to focus on ways in which registered counsellors can be made visible in terms of penetrating those disadvantaged communities where their services are mostly required. This will be in line with the reasons why the category was created in the first place. This might help in terms of the public and professionals recognising registered counsellors as important role players in terms of the well-being of communities. Another area that needs more research is how the name “registered counsellor” can be changed to limit the confusion created in the counselling profession. I think a name change might create enough awareness of the important role these healthcare professionals play.

9.6 Personal reflections

My experiences as a registered counsellor helped me understand the stories told by the three participants in terms of their views about the relevance of this category in South Africa. My take is that registered counsellors play a major role in mental health but because of not being promoted, their services are not recognised.

South Africa had a fair share of challenges in terms of mental health and if registered counsellors were promoted and taken seriously, Life Esidimeni tragedy, for example, would not have happened.

9.7 Conclusion

This study has given the three registered counsellors a voice to share life experiences that they have encountered that led them to choose careers that they had chosen. This has helped in eliciting rich information around their stories as registered counsellors.

From their stories, it became clear that the need to help others was the main reason that led the participants to become counsellors. It was also noted that this need to help others stemmed from the negative life challenges that they had directly or indirectly experienced.

Furthermore, it was also noted that the participants felt that they were relevant and had a future in South Africa in terms of offering primary psychological interventions. They believe that more must be done in creating awareness to the public about their role as dictated by the scope of practice.

It is recommended that future studies should include creating ways for registered counsellors to be visible in order to be accessible to the communities where their services are needed the most. This will help in creating awareness among the public about the relevance and importance of registered counsellors in South Africa.

Another area for future research should be a consideration of a name change for this category to avoid confusion that is created about who registered counsellors are as well as what their role is. Hopefully that would help the HPCSA to create a clear scope of practice for these healthcare professionals.

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